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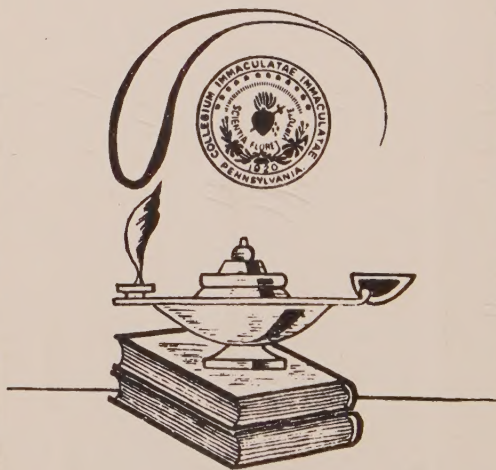
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BEDE JARRETT, O.A.

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FOR PRIESTS

BEDE JARRETT, O.P.

For Priests

WITH A FOREWORD
BY
ROBERT W. GLEASON, S.J.

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FOREWORD

The ageless quality of classical spirituality is much in evidence in Father Jarrett's *For Priests*. These chapters cannot but be invaluable to the priest at his *prie-dieu*, reflecting, as they do, a deep understanding of the priestly vocation, its supernatural invitation, its human representatives.

The distinguished author launches out into the deep of essentials: the meaning of perfection; commitment to the unforeseeable will of God; sin; regret; faith and hope and charity. These graceful, mild pages, sober, compassionate, realistic, invite to prayer and reflect prayer. Everywhere the glance is lucid, human, aware of every nuance of ennui, temptation, joy, light and shadow, question and affirmation that threads the priest's vocation. The gentle urgency, the detached, compassionate, ironic insights are the open speech of a great priest to fellow priests.

Father Jarrett's paragraphs are meant for reflection—not a casual, probing reading, but year in year out reflection; they merit this. Nothing of dusty moralism, no shred of cheerless censure, no voluntarism appear here. Only the deep truths, patristic

learning lightly worn, the savor of a great theology humbly relished show through these modest observations. The classic truths of the doctors of the inner life, known with exactitude, contemplated with love, are opened with discretion, charity, and a deep inner sympathy by Father Jarrett. These he knows; and, again, the aridities that cross the aspirations of a priest's life. *For Priests* is less an exhortation than the sharing of human experience and the experience of God to those who can read aright. Every shading of judgment suggests the tact, the silence, the warmth of a priest who loved his priesthood and his priests.

For all the gracious humanity that glows in Father Jarrett's thought, it is a demanding spirituality to which he discretely invites. His pages on contemplative prayer merit prayerful reading and rereading. The soul's encounter with the Lord of life in the simplest form of mystical prayer is laid open here so deftly it seems almost natural, an ideal certainly accessible, which can and must be sought, even by the burdened, distracted, peripheral priest. Towards such a life of prayer, through measured, urbane, aware consideration of suffering, sin, sorrow, acceptance, of gentle judgment and human adulthood, Father Jarrett leads with an honest and demanding surety. The wisdom, the *discretio*, the compassionate urgency will be recognized by his fellow priests

as the fruits of a priest's heart, docile to the Spirit of order and understanding.

We suspect that *For Priests* will be accepted and quietly treasured by priests. Its empathy recommends it.

Robert W. Gleason, S.J.

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FOR PRIESTS



THE CULTIVATION OF PERFECTION

In our Lord's view of holiness, whether for priest or people, the central part of it lies hidden within. There is little means of judging a man's holiness, since it is concerned not with acts but with motives, and motives are out of sight. In these chapters, therefore, the real effort will be to help my brother-priests to remember this. We need reminding that it is never what we do, but why we do it, that most matters. If we can get our motives right, the rest can be left to follow its own way. Moreover, motives themselves are commanded us in the saying that we must love. Love is less an action than a motive for action. We are bidden, not to do, but to love.

We shall, therefore, take the main underlying ideas of our Lord and try to lay them in a scheme of spiritual teaching. We as priests shall only be true priests in proportion to our spiritual life's energy. Not our work but our soul is what we shall take to the Seat of Judgment at the end.

So we have set out what constitutes the essence of that perfection which our Lord laid on us as a

command. Then we have spoken too of the way in which that perfection manifests itself, namely, in the acceptance of the divine will, for it is clear that we shall be perfect if we leave ourselves to be trained by God. Hence, we must trust him absolutely and suffer in serene love whatever he shall do to us. Then will he gather us to himself. But we must needs have a consciousness of our native sinfulness, and because of our insufficiency be led to put all our confidence in him. We must not only remember that we are worth nothing, but also that he is worth all. Since he is all, he also does all. In the language of the old mystics: "There is no doer but he." Even sin has a place in his economy of grace, so that we must not let ourselves become impatient of our faults but use their memory to love God better. This the Passion of Christ can achieve in us, through the compassion of God's mother, in our prayer and contemplation. Thus, shall we be made perfect in hope.

"Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). That saying of our blessed Lord is one that continually puzzles us. Thus, we listen to what he says and we know ourselves and we know too that he knew us better than we do. We know ourselves and know that the idea of the infinite perfection of God is something not only above us but utterly impossible to us, beyond our very dreams; and yet our Lord, who knows human nature for

he made it, gave us not as an invitation but as a command that we should be "perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect." How can we be perfect? How can we be perfect as God?

But when we use the word "perfection" or say of a thing that it is perfect, we may mean all sorts of things, we may mean "perfection" in all sorts of ways. Thus, we even use the word of a ruin. People say that Tintern Abbey is a "perfect" ruin. We do not mean that it is complete, for it is a ruin; but we mean that it is perfect as a ruin, perfect in its own order, perfect in its place. We may say of a speech that it is "perfect," and by that mean that it contained no word too much, no word too few. It could not be improved on. It was perfect. We say of a witty answer that it was a "perfect" reply, meaning that it fitted the situation exquisitely, that nothing better could have been said. Or again we can say that the silence was "perfect." We mean, of course, that it was absolutely complete or in place.

Can we not then describe perfection as implying completeness in a particular order, so that the perfect thing does completely what it is wanted to do? Thus, a mechanical instrument is perfect or complete if it does its work thoroughly, exactly fulfills the purpose for which it was designed. Thus also we can say reverently that God is perfect because he fulfills all that he is: "I am who am" (Ex. 3:14). God is perfect; in him everything is in order. Again,

his world is a perfect world in its own order, for everything in it is in its proper place. God is perfect. But man was made after the image and likeness of God. Man therefore—you, I, all men—was created to be perfect, but perfect only as man, perfect only as a man should be: all his powers, his passions, his emotions, his intelligence, his will, all are to be perfect, each in its own place, doing its own work, fulfilling its own purpose as—if it is properly in order—it will do. That is what man was intended to be; he was made after God's image and likeness. That is why it is, and how it is, that man can be perfect. He is formed on the model of God.

If you remember, even as a child when you learned your catechism, you were taught that man is like God—that is, like the Blessed Trinity. Since then, you did your theological studies, and now have better understood that he is so by nature. God made him so in his first creation. And you have learned too that, besides his nature, he received a supernature—treasures of grace by which his soul is again made like God a second time by participating in the divine life. God is perfect; man, fashioned after God's likeness, was also intended to be perfect in two orders, both by nature and by grace. And also he was to be perfect by a determination of his will. He cannot be perfected against his will.

Our Lord said: "Be perfect." That is evidently a command. Are we perfect, that is, are we fulfill-

ing our purpose? Are we perfect, having everything in order, our intelligence, our will, our love, our anger, our hopes, our desires, everything about us doing what it should be doing, every power and faculty exquisitely obedient and alive? That is what he meant us to be, that is how he fashioned us.

But this perfection, orderliness, was to be aimed at deliberately, by our own will. You will never be perfect unless you want to be perfect. Honestly, do you want to be? Do you want to have your anger completely under control, never to be angry except when it is reasonable to be angry, never to love unless you should, never to enjoy what you ought not to enjoy? Do you want to be perfect? They that have tasted it—saints, we call them—say that it is a thing blessed beyond dreams. They were men, women, children who set themselves perfectly in order, aimed at perfection, wanted it, heard of it, and acknowledged it as a divine command.

Can we be perfect? What have we to do to become perfect? It can be maintained that quite truly we have very little to do. We believe this to be God's world; we believe God to be in charge of it and us. We believe that God fashioned our world, and that God made each one of us. But God made us intending that we should know our own way, goal, and purpose, and achieve it for ourselves, and thus reach the perfection he meant us to have—a perfection, that is, within our scope.

How can we achieve this goal? Leave it to him, leave it to him entirely; he will get us there, if we will but let him. That is all that we have to do, to let him make us perfect. It is his job. God governs us, God governs our life absolutely. Every moment of our life, then, we are under the infinite power of God. Because you believe this, you must try not to chafe against God. Do not fight against him. Let him deal with you; he will treat you in the way he sees you need. Nothing is asked of you but this absolute acceptance of the divine will affecting every detail of your life.

Have you grown old? Or are you middle-aged or young still? Whoever you are, God is watching you, who slumbers not nor sleeps. God is watching you, not to do you hurt, but to make you perfect. All that is asked is that you should surrender yourself absolutely to him. He will give you what he sees you need for the perfection of yourself. Have faith in him and you will remain tranquil, putting yourself into his hands.

"But what will he do with me?" He will make you more truly and more fully after the image and likeness of himself, as he made his Son. "Shall I be happy under what he does to me?" Do you remember how God treated his Son? It is a foolish question to ask, if you do remember. You certainly can be happy. But whether you will be or not, depends entirely on yourself. "Will he treat me harshly?" God chas-

tises those whom he loves. That is the price you must pay for your divine fashioning after the image of his Son. You will be bought and sold, denied, betrayed; you will have false accusations brought against you. Yes, but the point is: What are you going to do about it? Are you going to leave yourself absolutely in his hands? Or are you going to fight for your good name? Do not so act! Dare to leave yourself to his fashioning. After the example of his Son, if you wish to be perfect, be submissive. Surrender yourself body and soul to his will. "Be ye perfect"—dare we even aim at that? What were his blessed words? He knew human nature as we cannot know it. He knew its baseness, as we even do not know it; he knew his frailty, its inconsistency. Yet, knowing it, he dared to say to us: "Follow me."

How well he thought of us, how nobly he judged us who said to us: "Follow me. Come where I go, follow me to the heights of self-sacrifice that I have climbed." He would not have said it unless he meant it, unless he knew that we could.

Was he a dreamer? He was no dreamer. He knew mankind, for his fingers had fashioned them. He knew the shallowness of those who then followed him and of those who would follow him, but he knew also their depth, their greatness. And knowing this he calls all of us to follow him.

What he asks is that we should come willingly. So we must answer him personally, one by one.

Are we willing to follow him, really willing? I do not think we really are; I think we are desperately afraid of what he may ask us to give up. St. Augustine, as a youth with his dreams and idealism and yet with the frailty of his flesh, prayed his broken prayer: "Give me chastity, but not yet!" Not yet! Is that not like our own heart's prayer? Perfection? Yes, but not yet!

He says to us: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." We were made after his image and likeness, made so by nature, made so by grace. He tells us that, even after we have sinned, he will again re-make us to that blessed likeness, if we will let him deal with every detail of our lives. All that is asked of us is to accept his divine overmastering will and this may well include the crown with thorns, the scepter set in our hand by way of mockery, the garment of a fool flung round us. Do not be troubled by these. Take them as part of life. In your young priesthood or grown middle-aged or old, take his will each one. If you will but let him, he will make a saint of you. When he comes down on the altar at your Mass, ask this Master, thus passing by, to give you the high courage and the blessed patience you need to let him deal with you in his own way.

Out of our troubles he will fashion of us priests more worthy of himself. Out of our difficulties he will fashion each one of us for some grace of life,

+ particular grace he had in view when he
Out of our forlornness he will make of us
er vessel as it seems good in his eyes to make
it." As you say the *Pater Noster*, repeat with special
meaning before him that phrase of it that asks that
his blessed will be done.

2

ON ACCEPTING GOD'S WILL

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him
(Jb. 13:15).

It is a great advantage to us when we realize that our lives lie absolutely under the providence of God. From the point of view of our spiritual lives, this gives us the proper angle from which to judge them, the necessary spirit in which to live them and to receive in them whatever God gives us. Perhaps you have sometimes heard grown-up people, when they wanted to give little children candy, telling them to shut their eyes and open their mouths and see what God will send them. More or less, I suppose, this should be our attitude to God, and this the way in which we should try to take our lives. That is, we should try to realize how the whole of life lies under the divine governance, guidance, providence; and to realize, consequently, that what God asks of us is to surrender that which alone it is in our power to give.

Look at your life. You know by now your difficulties. Some spring from your own character and remain with you; some spring from the circumstan-

ces, and these will no doubt change as the circumstances change. You know the difficulties that come from your parish or work, you know the particular people whom at the moment you find difficult. Now, these are difficulties that you have to meet. It does not matter whether you are beginning or ending your priestly career, these in some shape or form you will have to meet every day of your life. You must begin, then, by saying to yourself that all these are supervised and governed by God.

You believe this, for this is the first article of your Creed. You believe that there is a God over all. Because he is God, the Father Almighty, he controls the whole of life. What, then, am I asked to do? I am asked to accept his definite ruling of life, to submit my will absolutely to his, and to be prepared for his detailed dealing with me. My will? Yes, we answer, I submit it. I shall try to do faithfully all that I am told to do by God. A child goes through its child life with older people in charge of it. Now, the child can say, if it likes: "I am going to let these older people deal with me. They are wiser than I am. Moreover, they are stronger. I cannot escape them, even if I would. Therefore, I am going to accept patiently whatever they do to me. I shall not understand why they do what they do to me, but I shall know that they are doing it for what they think to be my good." Or it is possible for the child to rebel and refuse to do anything

until it is compelled to do so. It can make up its mind that it is going to take charge of its own life. It can challenge everything that is done to it, and accept only what it is forced to accept. What we are asked to do, then, is to take life on the terms of the accepting child, and believe that what is done is done to us by him who knows best what is right for us, who is strongest, most loving, most wise.

But here comes in the one trouble of life. We resist. We should submit, because we know him to be wiser and more loving. We should submit before we know what is going to happen to us, on the basic principle that his judgment must be better than ours, that his judgment must be best. Thus, a second time, by the offering of our will to him we become priests, sacrificing a willing victim to God, taking his determinations, accepting his rules. I shall not be found fighting against God.

But how do I know when it is God who is dealing with me, and not mere human interference? Our lives are so much at the mercy of one another. There is this one (my superior, my subordinate, my bishop, my people) who seems to me unfair, unjust. Why should I submit to him? Can you really expect me to believe that this injustice is an act of the divine will? Is it not due to human folly, jealousy, revenge, dislike? Why should I say that the terrible injustices of this world are the result of a divine will? Why not say that it is a human will that is false, mischievous, spoiling my life or the lives of others? Well,

it is not really difficult to know whether it is the will of God or no. If it be of God, you will not prevail against it. Alter all you can, but accept what you cannot alter. Accept whatever is beyond your power to remove. It would, indeed, be foolish to accept everything that happened to you as though no human effort should be made to mend the hurts of life, for there is a remedy for many of our ills. We may try to remove our pain. We can cross the street if the wind be too fierce on our side of it. We can cross out of the shadow into the sun. But if there be no sun? We must then take what we cannot alter. We may better ourselves if we can. But we must also realize that, if human sin and suffering and folly are the immediate causes of our distress, these have their place in this divinely-governed world. We know that Calvary was due to human sin and folly. Yet, Calvary redeemed the world. This is part of our very faith.

You and I are asked to give up our wills to God. We are asked to accept whatever he does to us; for the most part this will not be done directly, for God does little directly to us. Most of what he does to us, or at least so much of what he does to us, reaches us through other agencies or is due to all sorts of other things. We are asked to take it, accept it, see the will of God ever behind it, keeping our eyes steadily on him.

It means, too, that we do not worry ourselves with the problem whether we are making a success

of our spiritual lives. Why, for instance, do we not pray better or pray as much as we should? Or why are we not constant in prayer? Because we find our prayers so dull, because it seems that we cannot do anything with them. We go into church and kneel down and begin to pray, but nothing comes, nothing seems alive. God does not seem really and truly there. What is God asking of me? My will! My will! He does not ask me to make a success of my prayer. He does not ask me to make a success of anything. Success lies wholly and solely with God; moreover, so blinded are we, you and I, that we do not know when we have made a success of anything in the spiritual life. God is the only person who knows. He alone knows whether my prayers are a success or not. We may think our prayers are good, and God may judge them to be too self-satisfied. Sometimes we pray and our prayer may seem dull and full of distraction. Yet, for all we know, God may judge it to be well. Success, failure, we know nothing about these. God is the only person who knows. We cannot prejudge, forestall the Judgment. You cannot judge your life or your character or anything that you have done. Leave it to God.

Still less can you judge anyone else. Leave all to God. This is God's world. You and I are under the divine power; we must accept what he does. We should not plague him with our ideas but be content with his own judgment, sure that under his guidance our life shall be as it should. God is wiser

than we. God knows far better than we what we can do well; so, instead of asking him to take this or that from us, we ought to trust to his choice of what we should have. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

We must, then, have an absolute trust in him. This trust must never waver, must be held to constantly through life. This will help us to be consistent in taking whatever he sends us—the sunshine and the shadow, the wind and the shelter from the wind. We do not imagine, therefore, that God asks only unpleasant things, nor on the other side do we suppose that we ought to have our way in life simply because it is what we should like. We lay aside our will and make an offering of it. It is the only thing we have to give to God; and we make a gift of it to him by accepting the life that he has planned for us. We meet it on those terms. We cannot escape our life; we cannot get away from it; we are not big enough to fight with God. All we can do is grumble at him. That does not hurt him, but it does hurt us. Nothing is gained that way.

God is our companion and he is not to be resisted as a companion. We cannot break away from God. Down God's road we must travel and God only knows the road. So leave yourself to him. You will find that he will take you where he wishes to take you. Fight with him, and you must still go his way. You can accept what he has chosen for you and say: "I will take his way because it is his choosing." Or

you can grumble and try without result to obstruct the divine will. The weather? What are you going to do about the weather? Why grumble at the weather? It is God's management of your life. Why not take it from him? One expects to find children grumbling about the interference in their plans by the weather, but it is strange and unexpected to find how often priests will complain. A child knows no better. But we are not children still. We say that we believe God to be in charge of our whole life. Does our temper correspond to this belief?

Periods of depression—how do we bear with them? People ask of us what they should think of them. Are they to be charged to God's account? Are they not the result of human folly? Perhaps. But that does not say that they are also the will of God. Certainly there are inevitable consequences of human acts which God does not remit. Thus, he allows war, which is man's own folly. He chastises; that is, he lets our sins pay us in evil coinage. But his motive is love always. He chastises because he loves and in order to cure. Thus, his chastisement is as much the effect of his mercy as of his justice. We cannot well distinguish which of these two attributes is operative in any one action. They reach the same end. They are united in his act of love. We do not know what is the motive of God's action. We only know that God it is that acts. Is not that enough for us? It hardly matters why God does what he does, for

it is sufficient to remember that it is he who does it: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Behind his act of slaying lies, as his motive, love.

Can you trust yourself to God absolutely? I am afraid that you must. I am afraid that, whether you wish it or not, you must trust yourself entirely to him in life and death and beyond death. But it is our comfort that we have to do this; indeed, that in his love of us we are allowed to do this. As we say daily in the Mass, *Audemus dicere* ("We make bold to say, 'Our Father'"). To find a comfort in this act of confidence, all we need to know is the sort of person God is. If we knew him, we should be glad to trust him. The saints trusted him absolutely, but that was because they knew him. Even when he seemed to treat them harshly, they were quite sure what his intentions were and relied entirely upon what they knew about him; thus, they were not only tranquil under his treatment of them but were happy under it. It gave them pleasure to know from their familiarity with his character that all was well. After all, we have all had friends on whom we could rely. Here is a Friend greater than any other, wiser, stronger, who has loved us more than anyone else will ever love us. We may get tired of God, but God will never get tired of us. However little there is of loveliness in a man's heart, God still will love him. He will always find something in man to love. His ingenuity in love is immeasurable, is infinite,

for in us always he sees the image of himself. Whatever happens, that can never be removed from us. Because he loves us for his own sake, he must love us to the end.

We are asked, then, to surrender our will absolutely to him. To do this thoroughly will take up all our time. It means, in effect, that we accept the life he has planned for us. Whenever our plans go awry, we must see in this his kindly interference to save us from our follies and we must be blessedly content. Go down on your knees to thank him for the obstruction of your plan or your ambition, for it must have been placed there by him to prevent you going astray. To the height of thanking him when we have failed in our plans, he called us when he set on our lips: "*Semper et ubique gratias agere.*" "*Semper et ubique,*" under all circumstances we should be grateful. But first he gave us his own example: "Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt. 11:29). Do not expect too much in life. Take what he gives you. Though he slay you, still do not lose your confidence in him.

Again, then, we must accustom ourselves quickly to see the divine hand at work in all that befalls us. To believe in him so, is to find life simple, though happily life will still be hard. It will be simple because his blessed revelation is amazingly clear in telling us that all is under his guidance. It will be hard because we are all of us cowards, and we grow not less cowardly as we grow more old. When we

were younger, we could carry things with more spirit. As we grow older, we seek for comfort on every side. Yet, life is simple like the clear light of a frosty day when the sunshine breaks through and shows us everything in exquisite outline—the delicate tracery of the trees against the almost metallic sky, clear like that and cold like that, unless you bring to it the warmth of your own heart's love. Clear is life but it is hard, and it steadily grows harder; but God helps us and by that help, so the saints bear witness, strength and peace are to be found. Joy in its fullness stands over on the further side of death. Here at least is peace always if our will is locked in his.

3

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

To you it is given for Christ not only to believe in him but to suffer for him (Phil. 1:29).

The one thing that we have always to remember about the sufferings of Christ is this, that he took sufferings on him by his own free choice. His case was different from everyone else's, because in his case a life of suffering was deliberately chosen before ever he came into the world. God from all eternity, man only from the moment of his conception and birth, he chose a life on earth that should be full of discomfort and of suffering.

He could have become man under very different conditions. He could have made atonement to the divine justice by an act of infinite love and obedience. The Incarnation by itself could have redeemed man; it could have been accepted as a world's ransom and would have outweighed all man's sins. There was no need for him to have suffered if merely he had wished to satisfy divine justice. Justice would have been content with the least, but generosity wanted to give all. So he chose suffering of his own free will. By that means he taught man a wholly new way of life. For, however

you read the story of his life and his sayings and whatever critics and others may say about them, no one can take out of them their note of austerity and suffering. These can never be explained away. The Cross is too prominent in the Gospels to be left out of them. There are too many texts that speak of what his following entails for anyone to suppose that the Christian way of life is possible without suffering. Suffering is the sign of his fellowship according to St. Paul. Who should know better than he?

And so it is that God loves us too much to let us escape out of life without suffering, for it is because he loves us that suffering comes. This is a dark saying, but it is of the essence of Christianity that we should believe it. Our attitude to suffering is, therefore, the test of our attitude to the teaching of Christ. Suffering and man's attitude towards it have always been the touchstone of faith. His real difficulty against the existence of God has always been the existence of sin and suffering. If you remember the life of St. Augustine you will remember that this was the precise point on which as a young man he went wrong, for he could not reconcile the world's imperfection with the doctrine of one Creator who was infinitely perfect.

He chose the particular heresy of the Manicheans because, by denying the sole creatorship of God, it allowed another creator to be responsible for the world's evils. To pass over eight hundred years and

come to St. Thomas Aquinas is to find the same problem torturing the minds of that age too. Nor is our own age any different. The great buildings of the Christian Science churches are a standing witness of the same confusion wrought on man by the finding of sin and suffering in his world. To what is this religion due but to the wish of man to explain away sorrow, suffering, and sin in the world? These try to answer the problem by denying that it exists; they answer the problem of evil by saying that there is not any. Listen to those who preach the gospel of Communism. They raise the question of religion only to condemn it because, "if there were a God, would he let man suffer so much wrong?" It is the inevitable problem. Everywhere it is the supreme problem, not for the people only but for us priests as well. It is the eternal problem: "What are you going to do about suffering? How will you place it in your life?"

Into our world came the Son of God. Coming, he chose suffering. *Chose it.* That is our answer. They say to us that there cannot be a God, for God would not allow suffering. Is it unwise for us to argue with them? Perhaps it is better to go our own way believing. Those who do not accept God have (we hope) some comfort from their denials, for at least the suffering still remains, deny him or no. Suffering indeed will always be there. If by denying God you could shut out of life all sorrow, staunch sorrow's wounds, wipe the tears from sor-

row's eyes, it might be worth while considering the advantage of a lie; but the whole point is that sorrow still remains and has still to be dealt with. When one denies God, all that has happened, as far as this problem is concerned, is that atheists have taken away not sorrow but the means to bear with sorrow, not the tears of mortal things but the stilling of them. They shall still hear men crying in pain in their streets, still hear the voices of children sobbing in distress. Not only in the streets do we hear this lamentation but in every human experience. We may never guess how deep it lies in this or that one, simply because we cannot see their hearts.

Our Lord came then and chose suffering. That is his answer to the problem of pain. His gospel is that man can be greater for suffering. It depends entirely on how he bears it. Love can make suffering wonderful, love of God or love of man. Christ our Lord was on earth as a man, suffering and weighed down with suffering; he came like that because he was in love. Now, we do know that man is at his best in love. Man, woman, and child are at their best, noblest, finest, when they are in love. And the reason is not far to find. It is because then are they most unselfish.

Now, love speaks by suffering. It is eager to suffer if only thereby it is able to relieve its beloved of suffering. It is the very prerogative of love to ask that some task be set it to prove itself, that it be given some burden to bear. Love demands stern

proving. Protestations it knows are cheap. Love wants to pay its due with coin that shall have cost it dearly. Love, therefore, wants suffering assigned it that shall enable it to show how greatly it loves. The old romances sang of it. When the knight went tilting to prove his fidelity to his beloved and entered the tournament with his lady's glove on his helmet to challenge all the world that she was the fairest lady, he sought hard blows, peril, uncertain issue; he sought pain. Man is noblest when he is in love. He wishes to be dared a hazard as a proof of his manhood: "To you it is given not only to believe in Christ but to suffer for him." To us priests is this given, we who hold in our hands daily the sacrifice of Christ.

Our Lord came, making choice of suffering. That is the point of his life and its relation to his doctrine; he came choosing suffering, he who was most wise, most sane, most true. No language is so clear as his is, no judgments so even-balanced; no beauty of word can compare with the beauty of his quiet parables as he told them, the perfect poetry of truth told finely, loveliness of thought matched with adequate speech. Sensitive, an artist (much more than that, but still an artist), tender, compassionate, he does not hide his infinite compassion for sinners, for children, for all suffering, for the poor suffering birds. Immensity of compassion is his. No one could call him callous; yet, he is the one who tells us that

suffering can make us beautiful, can fashion the soul to beauty, make it great.

Now, the point is here that, in this poor world we must believe somebody. We could believe those speakers who deny the divine existence, these Manichees, Christian Scientists, atheists, or we could believe him. These others cannot prove that God is not. To deny him is to dogmatize. Belief it is in either case. What does he say? He says that he can deal finely with us and make us of use in his world. After all, that is a great promise. What a little service we are able to give people, do we the best and most we can. As priests we have our Mass, confessions, sermons, visiting, and instructing to do. But even so at times we are struck, as we look back over our lives, at the seeming waste of them. How few we really helped, consoled, inspired. When we get towards middle age, how futile so much of our past life seems, how aimless our activities. When we were young, life seemed very full of business. We had little time to think, only time to do. But later on this doing hardly seemed to justify itself or redeem itself from mere fussiness. Life grew uninteresting. We grew more comfort-loving, selfish. People seemed less alive. Life's greatness seemed to have evaporated. We settled down to routine work, to keeping friends, to humdrum service. Life dwindled into littleness.

Now indeed there still remains a chance of greatness—not what we once thought of, a greatness

of action, but a truer greatness, the greatness of pain well borne. Pain can bring greatness to us. It can make people great. It need not. We have seen it in some of our sick, making them only discontented till they find life terribly wearisome. But this failure to grow great by suffering is not due to suffering but to the soul. This it was that our Lord had as his object when he said: "Follow me." For "to us it is given not only to believe in him but to suffer for him." That is, it is given to us to suffer for him out of love. Then only is suffering fine when love is the motive of its acceptance. Then it is borne not only with courage but with content.

Perhaps it is hardly right to speak of our troubles actually as if they were suffering in any real way. Suffering sounds too grand for them. They are rather petty, small. Perhaps our difficulties with our people or brother-priests or our bishop, if we told them to some outsider, would seem foolish and unreal. There is this person whom we find uninteresting, yet with whom we have to live. We are tired of this person, and all his stories which we have heard over and over again. We are tired of his slackness or domineering habits or secretiveness.

All this sounds small enough, tedium rather than suffering. But it is this very same smallness that makes it less easy to bear. What concerns us is that it can be turned to beauty. We can not only believe in our Lord, but suffer whatever comes to us out of love for his blessed will. What we have sent us, at

least does not depend upon our choosing. That is as well. We should not choose aright. To us it comes from God unchosen, a gift from on high. That is, we are asked to believe that it is a gift to us. The saints, those masters in the school of suffering, tell us that one day we shall awake and find it indeed a divine gift, experience it as something holy, though not in the years between. At present we have to believe this and live up to it. Then, say they, in God's incredible goodness he will show us the real beauty it has wrought. But for the moment all we can do is to go on believing and trusting in him absolutely—our hands in his hands though they be marked with wounds, our feet in pace with his feet, wounded too. So shall our heart beat beside his heart and feel it shares his sore troubles and the strain of its distress.

Remember that it is possible to suffer and yet be happy. I remember a woman once in a parish where I worked, down in a terribly poor area. I remember her dying of cancer—a terrible cancer, that type of cancer that is all pain. One day she said to me: "Need I take morphia? The doctor wants me to. Need I?" "No," said I, "there's no need to; but why not?" "I think it would be better for me not to. You remember my boy?" Yes, I knew and remembered all about her boy. "It would be much better for me not to, because then I could offer all my sufferings for him. I'd love to make an offering of them. I can, can't I? That is

the teaching of our faith?" What could I answer except that this was indeed our faith. She died in very great agony but wonderfully happy. The worse her pains grew, the happier she became. She thought that she was doing all the more for him.

These things can be. You will have them in your own experience also. The result of suffering depends on the soul. Not indeed entirely on the soul, for Christ must be brought in and God's love also. The remembrance of these does not take away but gives courage to bear pain. Thus, whatever pain is given is seen to be the act, not of God's cruelty, but of his kindness. We must not only believe, but also suffer for him. That is our gain.

He that was man's Lover was crucified. He asks us to accept the pain we can neither choose nor lay aside, and bear it, believing that it is able to make us great, as Christ was great, not in the fullness of his Godhead but in the fellowship of his pain.

4

THE CULTIVATION OF SPIRITUALITY

And I being lifted up will gather all men to myself
(Jn. 12:32).

One of the ways in which pride apes the fashion of humility is when a priest says: "It is all very well for you to talk religion and the beauty of suffering, but I can't say that this means very much to me. Perhaps it is my fault, but all I know is that there is nothing spiritual in me at all. I would very much like to have a love of the supernatural—prayer, Mass, Office, and the rest. I would be delighted if these things really pleased me. But frankly they don't." Such a priest will add: "I just don't happen to be spiritually minded. I find I am a very ordinary person, without any spiritual sense." If a priest has ever said this to you, you will have judged at once that his idea of the spiritual life had somehow worked loose and become distorted, and that he had forgotten what we mean (and what he once meant) by religion, or the sense of the supernatural, or an understanding of or love of the spiritual life.

After all, if it were really true that there was one single person, lay or cleric, who had nothing in common between himself and God, all our religion

would be mistaken, false, wrong. Our Lord came to teach the very opposite, namely, that he had a message for all: "I being lifted up will gather all men." On the contrary, then, our Lord maintained that the whole world was made for God, that the supernatural desire for him, the hunger for him, was implanted in man from his creation because he was a creature of God and elevated to the order of grace. It is not a question as to which people here or there were intended for God, were meant to pray, could be enlightened and inspired by religion; but it is everyone: "He enlighteneth every one who cometh into the world" (Jn. 1:9).

What is our religion? What does it suppose? It supposes the commonest elements in the nature of man. All that it requires from man is, I suppose, first a capacity to realize something you have never seen. Anyone who is interested in a book has that capacity; any one who listens to a story, has that quality. It is human, it is universal, the capacity to realize something you have never seen. When we are touched by a novel we are reading or disturbed by some one's loss or distress, we are using our imagination. That means that we are realizing something we have never seen. Secondly, we would say that another of the needs of humanity, if religion is to be grafted on to it, is that we should be able to respond to love, to answer love by love. We cannot always respond to other people's affection. There are some who are fond of us, and by some irony of

our nature, some tragedy, they merely weary us. Some people too for whom we feel affection and love are not in the least interested in us. But love can still awaken love. Thirdly, what we need is a sense of guilt when we have done something that we should not have done, something that impresses us as wrong.

Our blessed Lord did not come to destroy but to build up again human nature; he came to join mankind to God who had fashioned it. Our Lord, therefore, dealt with all men because he dealt with man, and with the simplest elements in man; just as he used the simplest elements of bread and wine for his commemorative Eucharist. Imagination, then, was the first need, something common, universal, the power to imagine what you have not seen. Then love answering love; and last a capacity for remorse. Is there any priest—indeed, any man, woman or child—that has not these rooted in his being? No one can be without them. These, however, are all that are needed in order that grace may have a nature on which to be grafted, a new creature, a gift of God. With these everyone has all he needs in order to be stirred into religion by God's grace.

"Behold I stand at the door and knock," he says. "If any man open to me . . ." (Ap. 3:20). How wide the invitation. Any man—not St. Bernard only, or St. Augustine or St. Dominic, but any man. "I stand and knock." At all doors comes he knocking. All will find him at their door. The Incarnation has made

this true. This brought God into the story of mankind in a more intimate way than before by making him visible to them. From that moment religion became an easier thing. Not immediately for us or in our age, but once God trod the earth. We are asked, therefore, to remember that he came and walked the same world as the one we know; we are asked to use our imagination, to believe the story of this dwelling of his amongst us, the drama of the Cross, the triumph of his rising from the grave, the manifold benefits that came to us this way. We are asked also to return the love he gave by love, and by our sense of sinfulness to acknowledge sin to be the experience of our nature—not difficult to those who are honest with themselves and not afraid to face the truth. Out of these simple elements of our nature religion can be molded. Out of them too will come a hunger for religion, even though we cannot feel its emotion.

It is one of the strange arguments of our time that men should say to us and that we should at last say to ourselves, that Christ is not easy of access to us, since he did no evil, could not sin. What use, men say to us, is this Figure who had so little in common with mankind? What contact have we with him who did no ill, so that in him was found no guile? He was perfect. He was peerless. It was his very challenge to his enemies that no one of them could convict him of sin. But since he was like that, how can we go to him? We are

drawn to St. Paul, who tells us that of all sinners he is the chief, who tells us too of the war in his members, whose flesh was buffeted by Satan's angel. Yes, but St. Paul was drawn by Christ.

Though our Lord was sinless, he was not feeble. He was perfect man; indeed, perfect, but a man. It is true that he never sinned, but all the qualities of humanity we have ever dreamed of were in him. All that our youth or boyhood ever revered was his. All that we ever hoped to be, all that our dreams longed for in life, all our ideals are in him fulfilled. All strength, all tenderness, all majesty, all purity, all compassion—everything is in him. He was man, exceptional only in that he was utterly man, perfect man, in that he gathered together all the ideals of manhood. It was not that he had not our nature but that he had it to perfection. That is what his sinlessness means. It is nothing to be afraid of.

People tell us that they are terrified of good people. No, they are not; they are terrified of "goody-goody" people. Good people are merciful, compassionate, understanding. That is what goodness implies. If we knew God, we should never be terrified of him. How could we be scared of God, with his marvelous tenderness, with his depth of understanding, God our Father? If we knew him, we should never be scared of him. If we knew him, we should love him perfectly; perfect love casts out fear. The saints see his beauty unveiled and love him without fear. Goodness is not repellent.

Hardness is repellent. But no one could look at Christ and think him hard. Compassion, tenderness, mercy, these he had; no character in history is so tender, so compassionate as he. In all imaginative literature there is none that can compare with him, none his equal in this.

Imagination? We have it. Love answering love? Where shall we find anyone to love us as he loves us? We are fonder of people than they are of us sometimes. We are not quite sure that they really love us as we love them. In his case we can be most sure that his love for us is greater than our love for him. Can we be perfectly sure? Perfectly. His is the widest gesture of a life laid down for us *because* he loved us. Imagination, then, and love answering love is ours. And remorse, the sense of guilt? None of us would say we have never had that. We would not dare. "I being lifted up will gather all men to myself." Note "all men" and "lifted up." God knows that he was lifted up.

All the ages that have passed since his day, have passed beneath the shadow where he hangs against the sky line. All have passed beneath the shadow of the Cross. When he hung there, every kind of man stood about him, gathered to him lifted up. Youth hung on either side of the Cross. One whose life had been misspent hung there and recognized divinity: "Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). A robber, yet he recognized a King. Beneath the Cross was youth that had never

faltered, the virgin Apostle whom Jesus loved. A woman rescued from the streets was there, broken-hearted at her loss. She, though she had been a sinner, also loved the Savior of mankind. Nicodemus, who faltered in faith and wavered, who had once come to him by night, frightened lest any one should see him going and yet who in his heart believed this Man to be a great teacher of truth—Nicodemus was there too. In him was gathered learning to the lifted Savior, that it also should be sanctified. Witness too was borne by a rich trader, Joseph of Arimathea, whose life had been devoted to the pursuit of gold. All of us in them were gathered to the Cross. All of us, all the world has followed him, many millions have tried to model their lives on his. Millions have come to the Father through him, as he said they would: "I being lifted up will gather all men to myself."

If we honestly mean that we have lost our sense of religion, if we mean that prayer has very little attraction for us, then it is clear that we have forgotten what this business of religion is for, what it stands for. That it means nothing to us, that we live so close to him yet gather so little from him and so rarely give ourselves to private prayer, that we hardly know what it is to pray—this can have only one explanation, namely, that we have never stopped to look at him or thought about him or read his life as it is written by those who knew him. That is all it means. He can still affect our lives, his words can still move

us, his example and teaching inspire us; but our spiritual life will be of value to us only if we take trouble over it. If we let everything spiritual go from us, and then say that it means nothing to us, we are merely being dishonest with ourselves and pretending that something has happened to us instead of recognizing the fact that we have brought it on ourselves and that what we have done we can undo.

In us is a rich capacity for God. If we but go to him, we shall find our every power coming to its fulfillment, everything we have will reach its proper end. The spiritual power, like every other power, if not used is more difficult to get going. Like a car left alone in cold weather, it gets frozen. Then time is required before it can be heated and start up again. A man can easily become like that in his spiritual life. The oftener that we pray, the easier is it to pray; the less often, the less meaning will it have for us. But always there is in us something to which our Lord must make appeal. He will awake in us faith and hope and love. What else is religion than these three? Lifted, he will gather us to him. May that prophecy of his be fulfilled in us.

If we be young in the priesthood, may he gather from us our eager youth, not the stale end of life but its fullness, life at its very best. Sometimes priests will say: "When I am old, then will I devote myself to the spiritual life." Pitiful that we should promise God only what we shall have when we are old. Now, when we have something worth his acceptance (as

far as anything here can be, for what have we that is worth offering to Infinite Power?), let us give it and not wait till it all is spent. Would that be love?

May he grant that we who are middle-aged shall have our old ideals reawakened, the ideals we have forgotten in the middle years. These are the years of listlessness or ambition—the hardest years.

In age may he gather us to him when the shadows lengthen and the powers of soul and body seem to grow dull, when others bear with us only because of their patience and not because of our deserts. May his prophecy be fulfilled in us that we be gathered to him in life and beyond life, gathered to the infinite vision of his unclouded beauty that comes at the world's end.

5

IS IT I, LORD?

In that part of the Gospel in which the Last Supper is described, our Lord is shown us breaking off in the middle of it to say to those at table with him that one of them is about to betray him. When St. Matthew recounts it from his own vivid memory of what happened, he tells us that everyone was much troubled at what the Master had said to them, and each questioned him anxiously: "Is it I, Lord?" Our Lord had told them that someone sitting there at table with him and with them had done a most contemptible thing—had sold and betrayed him. To this each answers with the question: "Is it I, Lord? Is it I?"

They had lived with him for the three years of his public ministry, had listened to his exhortations, and knew the type of character that he wished them to become, knew the virtues that he most extolled. Surely they had learned their lesson well. We can see that here. Not for one moment do they think of accusing one another of this terrible sin, this unspeakable conduct. Not for a moment do they suspect the others of it. Not even Judas crosses their minds as the likely offender. At the back of their minds is no thought as to who it could be. No one says even to

himself: "I can guess who that is." At last they have been formed by the hand of their Master. They say at once, each one of them, John, Peter, James, Thomas, Andrew and the rest: "Is it I?" Only self-accusations and by all.

We feel at once that these twelve gathered round their Master, these twelve priests at their very ordination service, have realized that they are, each of them, very near to evil, not as an outside enemy but as part of their very makeup. There could be no evil so loathsome as treachery; yet, each is at once as willing to suspect himself of it as suspect another. As we read this, we cannot but admire these men who so little suspect each other that they are ready to suspect themselves of being guilty of a crime that they have not done and are unaware of having even in mind. Each knew how near he stood to falling into evil. Have we not as priests to see in this a point of view which it would beseem us to have? This is evidently the type of character those priests had whom our Lord formed in his seminary. He wants, then, his priests to recognize what a little gap there is between themselves and the most revolting sinfulness, and also to be utterly unsuspicious of others' sinfulness, to know our own frailty and to be blind to the evil of those amongst whom we live.

When you open your paper and see that some ghastly crime has been committed (gross hurt, say, done to a child), perhaps your first impulse is to ask yourself how it can be that human nature can fall

so low as that. Let your second at least be the frank recognition: "I share that nature. That crime is the act of mere human nature. To those depths I myself can fall." We know indeed that, whoever the criminal was, he was as much human as we are, that he had a home, was a child, played with children, grew up with his family, was at school, went to work, had his friends, his hobbies, his pleasures, his quiet moments, his favorite books. There is no doubt a type of criminal of a mentally low grade, a subnormal being; there are too those whose surroundings from childhood have seemingly condemned them to a life of crime. We can have pity in our hearts for these, hardly or not at all blameworthy wrongdoers. But even those who started in good surroundings have slipped and fallen. We share their nature. No crime, however monstrous, is ever beyond us.

Perhaps once upon a time we can remember (is it a long while ago or only a short time?) thinking of some wrongdoing as having no power to tempt us, as the sort of thing to which we should not fall a victim, and yet we have fallen to it, at least in thought. Once upon a time, when we were boys at school or later in the seminary, there were things that seemed to us dreadful. Are they quite so dreadful now? Once there were things at the very thought of which we imagined the human heart would shudder. Yet, now we may have to confess that they no longer appall us as they did. We have at least become accustomed to them. Once we were shocked at

things people said; now perhaps we say them ourselves. Once upon a time—well, once all sorts of things distressed us, and now we are doing what then we scorned others for doing or, it may be, so far we do not do them, but only think them and are restrained from doing them not from any motive of religion but out of human respect. How we denounce human respect from our pulpit! Yet, from what have we not been saved by this same human respect. We were saved because we dared not let others know what was in our hearts and eyes. Someone was looking, someone might tell. Of course, in the world there is evil. Our Lord teaches there is evil in every human heart, except in those two that are our great inspiration.

Let us hold by this, that we live close to evil. Suddenly it may be laid bare—like lightning at night when the sky is torn with a sudden flash, and the dark world and some near horror is made manifest. Suddenly too we may see a menacing beast revealed to us within. At another time this is manifest to us when false accusations have been made against us or we are suspected of something petty or wrong. Our impulse is to be furious, indignant that anyone should think us capable of anything so base. We never even dreamed of doing it, we say by way of expostulation. Never even dreamed? When other people are boisterous in their denials, we are led to suspect that there must have been something in what was alleged against them. Over-strong protests have

the contrary effect to what they are meant to create in our minds. And our denials? Do we think people were taken in? But the accusations really were false. False in fact? Probably. False in desire or consent? Perhaps; perhaps not. Perhaps at least we very nearly fell.

Almost worse is it, not when they suspect us but when they praise us, when they say to us: "Oh, you are different from other people. You are not that sort of man." We dared not say anything by way of protest lest we should seem to be seeking for more praise. Yet, though we said nothing, our heart knew how false were the fine things they said of us. Then we realized how far short we had fallen of the praise they showered on us. Nor do we realize it any less when we have resisted evil but known how close to falling we had been. It is true that by the grace of God we escaped it, but "escape" was the right word; it very nearly had us in its mesh.

There is evil in the human heart, evil in every one of us. There is no crime so contemptible but we are capable of committing it; we share the same nature as the person who has done this thing. Between us and him, between our dreams and desires and his desires and dreams, there is something common. This our Lord taught the Apostles; and this they learned. His training was to self-insecurity, never being sure of self. Now, our Lord brought them there, not to leave them there, but to lead them on to something higher. Our Lord did nothing merely to

darken their world. He never tried merely to destroy their self-confidence. Not even for this did he speak so sharply to the Pharisees. He broke the self-confidence of his followers, their good opinion of themselves, only that he might build something better on the broken, contrite heart. On the ruins of self-respect he will fashion confidence in himself.

So he wants each of us to realize that he is a sinner, that there is something contemptible in him, that in him is that which would make his dearest friend loathe him if he knew. Because of that native menace in all men he came; because every man needed redemption from the beast within. This was to be accomplished by giving us confidence in himself, by our resting entirely upon him. By so doing the grace of God—the power of God, reaching us through the sacraments—transforms us into him. But the work begins by making us aware of our sinfulness.

We must first be taught to recognize that we are sinners. Once we have reached to this self-knowledge we have begun the work of our saving. Our salvation in effect will start in this way. The Light of the world will turn his light on the dark places of our soul. He will show us, as no one else can, the secret shrine of evil within us. He does this that we may realize how weak we are: "Is it I, Lord? Is it I? Am I really like that? Am I really so mean as to be no better than that after all that you have done for me? Am I like that still after so many years in the priesthood?" Yes, the whole point is that we, all of us, are and shall

always remain capable of the greatest villainy. This is no exaggeration of the pious preacher or the dreamy nonsense of some dithyrambic moralist. This is good, solid Christian teaching. Moreover, its purport is not to discourage us but to lift us up. He wants us to realize our weakness only in order that he may substitute for it his strength. He never does anything to put us off his service, but everything to bring us into his service. He urges us this way to ask for pardon and help and confidence in himself. Even children have their hidden source of evil. What dreadful nonsense is talked about the innocence of childhood. Children know less evil than we do, but they enter on the evil they do know quite as deliberately as we enter upon ours. Compared to us they are innocent. But within them, as they know so sadly, there is a capacity for wrong. There is evil everywhere. All our nature is most frail. Where one has fallen, all may fall. Our Lord came to repair mischief, not to say there was none.

So he gave man faith that he might have his eyes open to the wonderful things he has put to our hand, and hope to enable us to continue our efforts against temptations, and love that we grow not lonely in our fight but remember that he is by us. You will have found that in difficult mountain-climbing it is wiser not to look down. Even though the height above you is a great way off, it is safer to look up than down. Looking down shows you the awful depths below. The sight of these may paralyze you

and make you lose your balance. If you would climb, put fear aside. Hope is what you need. Hope is what he gave us. Hope? Yes, even in the cry: "Is it I, Lord?"

In the parable in which he described the judgment at the world's end, our Lord says to the wicked: "I was hungry, I was thirsty, poor, naked, in prison, dead. Yet you did nothing for me" (Mt. 25:42). They answer him: "When did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked, dead? There were many indeed in prison and rightly so, but we never saw you put there." To whom he answers: "You had your scorn for others. They were my brethren, so that in them it was me their brother that you also scorned." And then when the good were praised because they had cared for him, they had likewise to admit that they were not aware that they had done him service. Even the good were blind: "We did that sort of thing, but we were not convinced that all the cases we helped were genuine; yes, we did do what we could for them, but we did not realize that they were you." To whom his reply is instant: "Come, ye blessed of my Father." "What? Is it I, Lord? Is it I?" In that last scene the good look timidly behind them as though they could not really be the people addressed by him as blessed of his Father. Who were they to be summoned to the Father, who had helped just some few folks in human distress?

God will show us, priests, always the evil of our character, how close to the surface of us is the

untamed beast. But, if because of this we put our confidence in him absolutely, one day in his infinite mercy he will show us our good. Only if we lift our eyes from our good and look at our evil, and also look beyond it at that blessed compassion of his loving Heart; only if we can keep our eyes both on our weakness and his strength, will he say to us too: "Come, ye blessed." We shall be abashed and say the words that have so often been on our lips here in self-abasement: "Is it I, Lord? Is it I?" "Surely," will his blessed answer be, "Surely, thee am I calling. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."



HOW TO BECOME ONESELF

In the story of the passion and death of our Lord after the scene of the Last Supper we pass on to the manifold sufferings and indignities he endured, to the long-drawn agony of dying, to his death itself, and then to that laying in the tomb which seemed to so many of them that watched or heard of it the end of a shattered hope. We however believe that this was by no means the end but the beginning of a new life, which itself was a triumph over death, the victory of the Resurrection. We are reminded that "life" was one of the phrases or words he most loved to use when he wished to describe what he was and what he came to do. Thus, he spoke of his purpose in coming as that whereby he might give life and more abundant life to men. His doctrine, too, he spoke of as life-giving, like refreshing water; he spoke of himself as the very life he came to bring. Thus, he was to give himself to people, and by the very gift of himself was to make them more alive. To seal that teaching and to bring it into effect, the Resurrection was prophesied and enacted.

The Resurrection is thus the story of an historic happening in the life of our Lord, but also a proof

of something else beyond itself. It is a model, a hope, even a cause that will achieve the same result in each follower of his; the cause of triumph over every adversary, defeat, death, over sin and the haunting memories of all our past. Thus, Easter not only helps us yearly to hope again, but further lays on us the obligation to hope. This is not only a counsel but a command; for hope is a virtue that must be practiced by all Christians. The foundation of hope is, no doubt, in God himself, but the stimulus to it will be found in the mystery of the Resurrection, showing that there is no cause so desperate, no defeat so apparently crushing, no condition so hopeless, to which, if God wills, triumph will not come.

This life of ours (it is here we must begin) is a gift to us from God. It is not of our choosing. It comes to us by his choice. Since it is of his choosing, it is of his designing. We neither made ourselves nor can manage ourselves as we would like, nor manage the life that comes to us. For that very reason we can take a most hopeful view of life. If life lay under our own domination, we might well lose courage, seeing the whole burden lying on our shoulders. But the thought that it is his gift and after his design, gives us courage. If to this remembrance of God's creatorship we add the mystery of the Resurrection, we shall take even larger draughts of hope; for not life only but life's triumph lies entirely in the hands of God. Success is not the result of man's power but of divine power. Even in the life of Christ this was

most manifest. It was the Godhead that raised the humanity to life again; as man, God had died.

Hope thus has now become entangled with doctrine. Despair has become more than ever a grave sin; of all grave sins it is the most mischievous, the most undoing, the most destructive of effort, the most paralyzing. Against this, courage is not merely a happy choice, but a duty. See for a moment whence this duty springs.

Easter has made victory seem possible in the direst of defeats. Not only had he died the death of a felon, but all his claims were remembered only to be turned into derision. Because of his very miracles they jeered at him under the Cross: "He saved others; himself he could not save" (Mt. 27:42). He had proclaimed his royalty: "For this was I born, for this came I into the world" (Jn. 18:37). What was there now to show for it but a crown of thorns and a title on the Cross: "This is the King of Jews"—an open taunt of mockery! He came as a master to teach the world the living truth of God; he had gathered and trained a band of followers, and now what had become of his disciples? They were scattered. Only a short time before the soldiers had flung round the Master of Wisdom, as he claimed to be, the garment of a fool. He came with his claim to holiness: "Which of you can convict me of sin?" (Jn. 8:46.) Yet, his challenge was so little accounted that here he was dying the death of a criminal and seemingly abandoned by God. He even admitted it himself upon

the Cross. Could he be so holy, if at the end on his own testimony God had deserted him?

No cause, we say, was so low as his, and yet he rose triumphant. That message of his Resurrection must not be forgotten. Least of all must it be forgotten by priests, who are often those that most need to remember it. Who is so tempted to discouragement as a priest? If we were asked whom of men we thought most likely to be discouraged, we should have no hesitation in saying at once that in our experience it was the priest. Both from the point of view of what he judges to be his own little growth in holiness and of the many checks he receives in his work, he is liable to give way to discouragement that looks very like despair.

He is interested in his spiritual state, and yet he often has its shortcomings brought home to him—in his annual or biennial retreats, in his examination of conscience, perhaps above all when he is preaching to others and suddenly realizes that what he urges on others he has not yet done himself. He has made his efforts, but they have been so little effective that he almost despairs of ever overcoming his inveterate foes. Often he has made his resolutions and has realized what are his dangerous occasions; he has determined to avoid them or at least to be careful of himself in them since he cannot avoid them. But somehow the old conditions continue and the old faults remain. Or perhaps it is his work that seemed to be flourishing and now

has fallen down; perhaps a small criticism of his sermons is sufficient to deter him from further effort—or the reported saying of someone, or the preference one of his friends has shown for another. What tiny stings from minute insects inflame the human body, irritate it, perhaps fester in it. Even tinier stings will ruin a man's contentment and bring about his discomfiture and discouragement. Or the failure of a soul he thought he had rescued will plunge him into the state of mind in which he despairs of others as well as of himself.

That will not do. That is untrue to the Resurrection. A moral doctrine is involved—our obligation to hope. There is no soul this side of death which is beyond redemption. That is our faith. There is no habit of sin, howsoever firmly lodged, that cannot be broken by God's power. Thus is the cry made to all men: "Thou shalt not despair." There is no human character, howsoever tortured and twisted, howsoever unpleasant, that we have met in life, which cannot be changed. That again is our faith. Nothing of evil is final. That alone is final which is determined by the will of God. There is no nation so low that it cannot be raised again to greatness, so poor that it cannot be restored to prosperity, so defeated that he cannot give it the victory. There is no death over which he cannot ride triumphantly with his banner of life and his call to life.

But in his case his triumph came from this, that he submitted himself absolutely to the power of

God. He left his cause in the divine hands. He lifted no finger to protect himself; though he saw the legions of angels waiting for his orders to come and give him comfort, he did not call to them. He accepted whatever God's will had designed for him. He made no resistance; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter; he did not open his mouth. Now, we must fulfill the same condition if we desire a divine triumph. If you fight for your own hand, he does not promise you a crown. If you insist on going your own way through life, if you have already made up your mind what you are to get and how you are to get it, then your destiny will lie at the mercy of your own feeble powers. He promises life triumphant only to those who commit their cause to his hands. Go his way and accept his leading of you, and then he will give you the triumph he has designed for you: "I was dead and behold I live forevermore."

We need to remember this when we are dealing with our people—never to lose hope. We need to preach it to them year in and year out as our gospel of healing. We need to remember it, too, for our own soul's saving in our days of depression, discouragement, or even despair. He gives us what seems at first to be a dull thing, the doing of duty, the obligations of our priesthood; that is, he forces us to do what is his pleasure, his will; we can think it dull indeed or not as we will, yet we certainly have a motive for doing it joyously if we

care to do so. But in being forced to do his will we could easily get into a state of mind in which we wonder whether, if we trust ourselves to God and refuse him absolutely nothing that he asks of us, we shall not be left with a very dull life indeed. Shall we not lose the color of life and its sparkle?

Sometimes young people (and not young people alone) talk of "seeing life," and mean by that phrase something contrary to the priestly or even Christian ideals. They talk indeed as though life were something one had to sink into, or steep oneself in; something beneath one, something in the gutter or that runs down the gutter. They talk as though only those had lived really who had tasted all the excitements of sin. "Life" is what they call these excitements, as though goodness were something incredibly dull. But the great writers of our language have not all been men who tasted to the uttermost the fullness or the splendor of life or even its infinite variety, and we have as well the experience of many others who have had all this "life" and who yet got nothing out of life. These excitements are not in the least necessary for one to enjoy life or understand it.

It is not variety in life that make for its understanding or its fullness; it is intensity of living. This is something very different indeed. What did Shakespeare see of life that he should be able so to interpret it? Yet, he touched life at every point. Who can sound, as Keats can, all the notes of human

experience, the hopes, the fears, the dreams of human life? Yet, all he saw of life was a chemist's shop, consumption, and an early death. What experience had the Brontes to enrich their knowledge of human nature? In their remote Yorkshire village they found but little material on which to exercise their perceptions; but for man it is less the material which he experiences than the instrument which he uses in his experiences that is of importance. Not width of experience but delicacy of perception matters; and delicacy of perception can be produced as easily as width of experience: that is, both are the result of human activity. But one is a development of power and the other can be a dissipation of power. It is never the fullness of life but its intensity that makes the difference between these two. The flame it is that intensifies the power of each to know the world. When you shut steam within a cylinder, you get more power out of it, not less. When you give it freedom, you lose its effective value. Unless a soul be held down to duty, you lose its worth in the world. Look at our Lord, at the narrowness of his life, the narrow limits of his tiny world, the shortness of his sojourn, the quietness of his days; yet his boast is: "I am the first and the last" (Ap. 22:13).

It should be evident to us, then, that our Lord does show us the true way of regarding life and its meaning. He sets us the true note of victory by first setting us the true note of defeat. Unless

we have been crucified with him, we shall not rise with him, is the burden of the teaching of St. Paul. If you die, you shall live. If you surrender yourself wholeheartedly to him, he will take you up with him. Only from a tomb can a resurrection take place.

It will be seen, then, that we have a duty to hope always for ourselves and for others; and that this hope rests entirely on our faith in his Resurrection. Because he rose again, we know that never can we despair of ourselves or others. We build our hopefulness for others never on our experience of their good will or on their success so far; just as the knowledge of their lack of good will does not make us despair any more than would our remembrance of their continued failure, nor of course our own weakness or many falls. We trust always and only in the divine love for us, and so in the divine mercy. But then what could be a better basis for hope than that? That is an unchanging foundation which no experience can ever destroy.

We must have a quiet acceptance of the ways through which God leads us, going quietly hand in hand with God. We shall make no plans except such as can very easily be renounced when it is evident that they are not compatible with God's plans; we watch the days as they pass, taking those opportunities that are brought to our doors. Do not denounce the conditions of your life and blame them because you find yourself small-minded. All

life is great to those who care to see it so. Duty, the will of God, quiet acceptance, no resistance to God's despoiling hand, these are the essential needs. Go as he went and you shall taste the glory that he tasted as the First of us all and the Last of us, leading us home.

7

SIN IN THE DIVINE ECONOMY

If we were truly humble, we should never be astonished to find ourselves giving way to sin. We should indeed be horrified but not surprised. This is one of those things that are so hard, so impossible, to understand. Once we have really begun to try to see what we are like, we recognize ourselves to be the most evil of all creatures. This is no mock humility, for there is no room for anything mock in the spiritual life. This is true humility. At least, we can put it another way round by saying that we know more evil against ourselves than against anyone else. I know others in history or amongst my acquaintances who have done worse things than I, but I cannot say truthfully that they are worse because I do not know. I do not know either their temptations or their conditions of interior life, nor do I know their motives; and until one knows motives one cannot tell whether what was done was sinful or not. The Catholic Church never claims to judge intentions, to judge why people do what they do. She may condemn acts, but never persons in their own consciences: "All judgment must be left to the Son" (Jn. 5:22). It follows, then, that

I know worse against myself than against anyone else. I know that I am a sinner.

I have also every reason for supposing that I shall always be a sinner. At least, my self-knowledge suggests to me that it will be wonderful if I am not. There is nothing that I can think of in myself to assure me of any change in my character to warrant any supposition to the contrary; consequently, I have to keep in view, as far as my own power is concerned, the prospect of sinnership to the very end. To hold this in memory is at least to avoid any disturbing discouragement when I find myself giving way to my old sins. I shall not be surprised at their return, even if I find that for some reason or other I remain free from them for some time. To be surprised because I had kept clear of evil is more reasonable than to be surprised because I had fallen back into habits of sin.

The value of recognizing this seemingly depressing truth is, first, that it prevents me from falling into the habit of confusing hurt vanity with an act of contrition. To be distressed because of sins—especially of returning sins that I thought I had rid myself of—is not contrition, as like as not, but mere hurt vanity. Such an act of sorrow cannot well be supernatural, since God does not come into it but myself only. It has not a supernatural motive but a very natural one; it is not in the least a motive of conversion but the beginning of despair. Let me, on the other hand, hold to the conviction that I

am a sinner, and at least I shall not be discouraged at my falls; and this is no mean accomplishment. For priests are the most easily discouraged people in the world.

We shall always be sinners: consequently, we must not allow ourselves to lose heart over our sins. But why is sin allowed in the world at all? We do not know, and perhaps never will know till the very end of all, when it will no longer interest us to know the answer. But we do know this, that God allows it. Unless he allowed it, it would not be found here. We know also that God does not will it, because he could not be the perfect holiness he is if he willed it. Yet, though it be contrary to his direct will, it is not contrary to his permissive will. God allows it, and therefore God has a good motive in allowing it, for God cannot have motives other than good. God allows sin; God allows me to sin. Why? I do not know, but it is something to know that God does allow it and that he has a good motive for so doing.

Now, the fact that God allows it does not in any way excuse me from the guilt and responsibility of my wrongdoing. These sins are sins, and I know quite well that I deliberately chose evil rather than good. It was a deliberate choice of my will. God's permission does not, therefore, absolve me, but it does give me reason to think differently of my sin after the event than if it bore no relation to God at all. For it is clear that, since he allows

sin and since his motive in so doing is a good motive and since his only motive can be love, I am allowed to fall into sin because God loves me. However disconcerting this thought is, undoubtedly it is a valuable one because it makes me realize that something can be done with sin to make it useful to me.

What else can that mean but that God wishes me out of my past sin to come nearer to him, to find somewhere in that unhappy past a motive too for love. Nor is this difficult to find, for the past seen in this light is not merely full of my failures, it is also full of God's forgiveness—the remembrance of which shall surely be as important to me as the remembrance of my sins. Not only shall it be more important but more too in my thoughts, for thus shall I have more courage with which to meet life.

On this account let me not suppose that I have reason to presume on God's forgiveness. I must not, therefore, take as my conclusion, that it does not matter that I sin, for God will forgive me; God will not forgive me if I am not sorry for my sins, and sorrow I cannot have if I take no trouble to avoid sin and merely think of the infinity of God's mercy. But the way it should affect me is this: I should try to make capital out of this past sin by letting it bring me nearer to God. The starting point of this concept must be that there is a divine purpose being achieved by this permissive act of God. We know that he is so powerful that he could have prevented sin. We know that he did not prevent

sin. We know, therefore, that sin must in some way fit into his plan. Let us say, as St. Augustine did, that God is so powerful that he can bring good out of evil.

There is a passage in the writings of Juliana of Norwich in which this idea is stated in the terms in which a mystic would see it. She was privileged, as it seemed to her, to ask God why he should have let sin come; and his answer, as she understood it, was not a direct answer and yet an answer after all. God set in front of her the fact that by Adam's sin more harm was done than by any other sin, more harm to man and more dishonor to God. Yet, the remedy for this was the Incarnation, which was more pleasing to God than the sin of Adam was displeasing; else we should never have been saved. But also the Incarnation brought to man finer and fairer things than sin has brought him hurt and pain: "Since I have made well the most harm, then is my will that thou know thereby that I shall make well all that is less." This was to show her, as she thought, that even the sins of men have a place in the economy of God, and that man can, if he so chooses, use them for finding an additional reason for loving and serving God better.

Indeed, what else is the act of sorrow but some such act as this? It is the act of a soul that deliberately turns to its own sin, but not merely to its own sin. Sorrow is not merely self-regarding, else it would be no act of religion at all. Religion

is looking at God and paying to God what is owed him. What do we owe God when we have sinned against him? What is sin? It is an act or thought or word or omission against the law of God. Truly so. But it is also against his love. It is an act, not only of disobedience, but also of malice. God, therefore, asks of us in return by way of recompense not merely that we shall be obedient but that we should love. It is love exactly that we must have in our act of sorrow, or else it is not sorrow at all. Love is turning to God. Turning to God means that he is in our thoughts as an aspiration to help us to a deeper and stronger resolution to do better than we have done in the past. Past sin can thus be made to reassert to us the claims of God on us. This does not justify sin, but it can be made the way in which sin also plays into the hands of God.

Indeed, so strong is this idea in the New Testament that our Lord almost seems in a well-known scene to put a premium on sin: "Which of the two loved him most, Simon? The one who had been forgiven a little or the one whose forgiven debt had been the greater of the two?" (Lk. 7:42.) Surely the answer of Simon is reasonable: "He to whom most was forgiven has more reason to love most." It sounds as if our Lord wanted to teach that the converted sinner had more reason for loving God than those have who have never done wrong. But this he cannot mean. What is evident is the positive

teaching that those who have been forgiven much have much reason for love.

Sorrow then is an act of love. In it the soul looks beyond its own fault to see God at the end of the vista. Sorrow, to be supernatural, must bring in God, and that means that in my act of sorrow I have to think more of God than of myself, give more time to the consideration of him than of myself. That is why our Lord when he meets St. Peter after the Passion does not say to him: "Art thou sorry?" but he asks: "Lovest thou me?" (Jn. 21:15.) There is a whole world of difference between these two. Peter was sorry, of course. So also was Judas; else he would never have hanged himself. But the sorrow of Judas is a purely human sorrow, the sorrow that is the offspring of hurt vanity. He suddenly woke to the meanness of what he had done and was terribly ashamed. But shame is not sorrow. Shame is a much less inspiring emotion. It leads indeed of its nature to depression as the sequel showed. But love, on the contrary, is inspiring for the simple reason that it takes the soul away from the contemplation of itself—always a depressing sight to those who are honest—and focuses its attention on another. That is what we mean by love.

So the remembrance of past sin can become either of two things: an emotion which is self-regarding and depressing or an emotion that is other-regarding (to wit, God-regarding) and inspiring to further

effort. The difference between these two is the whole teaching of Christ. He came to lead men to God and that in every part of their lives. He came to lead them there through every thing they did. There must be no exceptions, no bare patches which are exempt from this. Even sin, once over, must be brought under the dedication of the Gospel teaching. Not even evil can be allowed to escape.

Again, then, we repeat that the priest needs to remember this as much as any one else does. Perhaps he needs it more than any one else. It is our experience surely, if we have had to deal with the unhappy cases of those priests who have fallen away (or perhaps we have had the more distressing sight to have to watch one gradually fall), that in more cases than not they have fallen away because they have despaired of recovery, because they have thought some habit of sin to which they had fallen victim was too compelling a bond. Afterwards they have invented other explanations, such as difficulties against faith, and so forth. But at base we know that it is the firm hold on them that sin had obtained that really frightened them and made them lose hope. How much safer to be sure that one will be a sinner to the end, that all we are asked to do is to realize this and continue our struggle; because the real point is that God can set our troubles right. We have perpetually to be turning to him for assistance, because we know that it is his will that we should be saved. As long as we

are not resigned to sin so as to make no efforts against it, we are in the right condition to escape from it.

Priests fail for one of two reasons, either discouragement or disdain; and both are the children of vanity or pride. Now, once you are convinced that you are a sinner, you are proof against discouragement, for you are already sure that you will never do very much, or at least will be surprised at any success that comes your way and will attribute it to the right source—not man but God. Any success that attends your efforts is not so customary that it is accepted as a habit; rather it is acknowledged to be a gift of God. Hence, that we overcome any fault and continue to overcome it never sets up the impression that now we are free of it, but only that God is most kind in giving permanency of a kind to the feeble efforts of our will. Hence, always there is complete acceptance of the idea that God is the giver of all good things, that good things come from no one but him.

We are left, then, to look back on our past with deep thankfulness for all the mercies that have been shown us, and should endeavor to show our gratitude in return by further efforts to bring ourselves into line with his will. It does not do to be thinking of ourselves unless we are also thinking of God; not the misery of man so much as the mercy of God should engross our attention.

Sin, then, can be used afterwards so as to make the memory of it an inspiration towards a greater love of God. This is also the real act of sorrow, the perfect contrition that thinks of sin and is sorry for it because it has offended God who is infinitely good in himself. Here is true sorrow in which self is forgotten and God only remembered. It is not sorrow only, but sweet sorrow: it is love.



THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

Perhaps there is no subject that should be more in our minds than the Passion of our Lord. It has an immeasurable effect upon our lives, whether we be aware of it or not—that is, whether we think of it or not—for we know in very truth that by it came all that we shall ever have of grace or goodness or reward. Its importance is infinite in our life; its influence on our conscious life should be supreme, since it alone gives meaning to our priesthood and to our priestly acts and sacrifices and refusals. Round it, therefore, our meditations and Office should circle; out of its deep waters should come the refreshment of our soul at Mass.

Let us remind ourselves, first, what the Passion is not. We need to do this if we are to serve God and love him, to know him as he really is. For sometimes, people about us, misunderstanding the mystery, are frankly horrified at the idea of God which the Passion suggests to them. They think it means a God who takes pleasure in human pain, whose justice is assuaged by the sight of men in torment, whose only concept of redemption is revenge on man for what man did amiss. We ourselves know

better than that, of course; but let us go over the old ground to remind us what the Passion has to teach us daily from our Mass. First, then, we can say that it was not the justice of God that demanded the Passion. What did the justice of God demand? Does the justice of God come into the story of sin, and why?

First, then, we remember what sin is. The old definition will be best here, that it is an offense against the law of God by thought, word, or deed, or by omission. At least, then, from this we can see that one part of sin is its disobedience. That we know and realize. But remembering it will help us to get into the right focus as to what the redemption achieved and why. But sin is not merely an offense against the law of God; it is also opposed to the love of God. That is the second thing we remind ourselves of. Sin, then, is an act of disobedience and an act of malice. It violates God's law and God's love. So here was the matter for which the justice of God needed to be invoked. That justice demanded that man, if he was to be redeemed, must himself right the balance that he had disturbed; man must do it, else he cannot be said to have fulfilled the justice of God. Yet, how was man to do it? How was man, a sinner, to set right the sins of the whole world? How could man set sin right at all? Sin was being repeated every minute, every hour, every day, and by all the world. This was far too much for a man to set right. Redemption

was, thus, beyond man's power. But if it was beyond man's power, then there was no hope for man.

What the justice of God demanded was a complete act of love and obedience that would equal or outweigh the numberless acts of disobedience and malice of mankind. Then came the Son of God. He came to answer the demands of divine justice, to satisfy that justice, and to establish man where he had been before he fell from God and began the long chronicle of his wrongs. This the Son of God was able to do, because he became man and dwelt amongst us; he took on himself human nature, and he was identified as one of us. That is what the Incarnation achieved. It enabled man to do what the justice of God asked of man. It enabled men to offer an act of love and of obedience that equalled and indeed outweighed all that man had done of disobedience and malice against God. Thus, through the Incarnation the atonement could be complete.

For this reason the early Church was so deeply concerned to preserve accurately the account of who it was that came and how he came. The very essence of the Christian teaching was involved. He was man; else there would have been no atonement. He was God; else that act of love and obedience would not have been able to redeem the world. So, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity took on himself a human nature. Thus, he was identified with us as a man and, sharing our nature, was made

one with us; and, since he was also God, his actions had a value commensurate with his own divinity—that is, an infinite value. But since he was always loving God at every moment of his human life, and since all he did was in accordance with his Father's will, his every act was an act of infinite obedience and infinite love. The Incarnation itself was that. So that, as far as the justice of God was concerned, the Incarnation would, all by itself, have sufficed to have redeemed us. To repeat that, the justice of God did not demand the Passion of our Lord. God's justice demanded that man should make a return commensurate with the mischief that he had done. What the justice of God, therefore, asked was an act of love and obedience that would outweigh the long series of the world's sins from the beginning of time to the end. To this purpose was the Incarnation designed, that such an act should be performed.

But then, if the justice of God was satisfied by the Incarnation, what need was there for more? There was no need from the point of view of God's justice. Justice is content with the exact repayment; it asks neither less nor more. But in God there was and is, not justice only, but all other virtues as well (if we may use an inaccurate phrase), such as generosity and the rest. God's justice was content with the least, but God's generosity was not content until it had given the most: "Greater love than this no man hath. Then I shall give the greatest that man can give." So while justice would have been

content with the Incarnation, generosity was not content till death had been achieved. So he passed on to the Passion.

We have, then, to see in the Passion of our Lord something undertaken beyond what was needed. It was a deliberate act of expressing in the only language that man understands, not only what sin means, but also what love means, especially what God's love means. God's love will stop at nothing to save us, as it has stopped at nothing in the story of man's redemption. There is no limit to what he will do for man. This is not only a lesson in the knowledge of what sort of a person God is; it is also an inspiration to us, explaining the way in which we are asked to take the sufferings that come our way. He took his, when he need not have done so. He bore his with delight; he was glad of the pains, since by them he was lifting off our shoulders what he was taking on his own. These he carried with perfect love and silence—generously, that is, without complaint. That is where his act becomes the standard by which we have to measure our own.

In the "Little Book of the Eternal Wisdom" there is a passage in which is expressed exactly the effect that the contemplation of the Passion can produce in the soul. It shows us exactly, therefore, what can also happen to us, and how we can profit from the exercise so repeatedly recommended to us by the saints: "I remember that one day in a time of depression and discomfiture, when all spiritual feelings

had left me and I was in so much misery of the spirit that I could not read nor pray nor meditate nor study, I retired into a corner of my little cell, and sitting with my hands in my lap made up my mind that there I would stay as I was good for nothing in the world. There as I sat, I heard a voice saying to me: 'Arise and betake thee, lover mine, to my crucified body, there recall my sorrowful Passion and thou shalt forget thy own sufferings and miseries.' So I arose and meditated on his sufferings and wept over his pains, and I found in truth that I was made free of all my sufferings and miseries, and never again was I in such sore plight."

To see this at its right proportion, it is well to remember that Blessed Henry Suso was the poet of the mystical group of writers that then flourished in Germany, and that we know from so much else which he wrote that he suffered naturally from the temperament of the poets, the raising and fall of spirits, the everchanging high spirits and depressions, that are so often the accompaniment of that gift of song. Well, here he found his release: "Never again was I in such sore plight." If he, thus set in the world, found here his release, it is most likely that we too can find our own escape the same way.

It is not hard to see why. We suffer so often because we see our sufferings exaggerated out of all proportion. We isolate them from the sufferings and miseries of the world, and are at once cast down at what we are asked to bear. But should it happen

that, when we are in that mood, we come across someone else who is in real pain, we instantly become ashamed of our complaining and recognize that our view is wholly jaundiced by our self-love. There is no remedy for self-pity so steady as the sight of suffering in a hospital. There we see it borne with a bravery which shames our little spirit, our complaints.

The priest has no need to visit a hospital to restore his feelings to a due proportion. He need not go so far afield: "Arise and betake thee to the figure of the Crucified," there meditate and you shall come away consoled. That does not mean that your sufferings will cease. God forbid! But it does mean that you will see them more truly than you saw them before. You will see them measured as they should be; measured over against the unchallenged sufferings of your Master, you will find your manhood restored to you. Your older bravery will return, for you will have found, not merely an example, but a motive for accepting all that comes your way.

So the Passion of our Lord has a large place in the spiritual life of a priest, saving him from those moments of depression in which he can so easily fall a victim to the invasion of his life by others. In the days of his distress he is most likely to find for himself such conditions of comfort as will protect him from the weariness that is assailing him. All men seek an escape. For Henry Suso it was by not

going outside his monastery door that peace was to be found. For others it is the very reverse. They think only to escape by being lost in the life about them, still more by going where they are made much of, where their amusing stories are greeted with laughter, their ideas welcomed, themselves so appreciated because so well understood.

Now, the Passion of Christ is the real and final remedy. It is final, because it is an ever-present remedy, it can always be had. It is real, because it alone deals with the trouble honestly. The other method works only for so long as the victim of it remains willfully blind to the fact that it is not a solution but a screen. To seek outside an escape from the weariness that can so easily become boredom, is merely to distract oneself from the problem. That is, we are merely being insincere. Now, insincerity has a peculiarly haunting quality. It infects so much that which at first was not its way of life. It spreads as oil does. It widens its sphere. It seeps in. We shall, therefore, be altogether unreal if we continue to dodge our problems. These must be grasped, not avoided. The Passion, become a center of meditation, is at once a solvent and a standard of value, a strength and a light.

That indeed is the point that Mass can take in our lives, because it does bring us up to the level of suffering accepted as love. It does set the ideal of sacrifice as something to be worshiped and not fled. It brings to the fore the realities of the Chris-

tian teaching, without which all our pieties are vain. We are not Christians merely if we invoke a venerable Name. Christianity is not a law so much as a spirit in which the law is carried out. The Epistles of St. Paul are forever calling attention to this. The law was in effect the mere carrying out of legal enactments or the performing of ritual purifications. To him the opposition between this view and that of the New Law is the difference between flesh and spirit, between fact and motive, between temporal and eternal. The New Law is what it is because of this new teaching. The new teaching centers around the Passion of Christ. It is indeed the burden of his message that, unless this is grasped, the Cross of Christ is made void.

Thus, the Passion of our Lord becomes a strength. There is an ejaculation that may well be often in our heart: "Passion of Christ, strengthen me." We whose whole need is strength—strength to begin, to face trouble, to persevere—shall only find it under the inspiration of that act which expressed in itself the highest point of human endeavor and achievement, the greater love with which nothing here is comparable.

It is this that makes the yoke we carry easy. It is still a yoke, but a motive is vouchsafed us whereby its weight becomes itself an easement, and its burden also made thereby more light. We have only to watch his Passion with sympathy and discernment, and we shall go his way through his grace.



THE MOTHER OF GOD

It is evident that the important attitude of the soul on which we have to be insistent with ourselves is that of confidence in God. If we can achieve that, we shall have the firm foundation that our spiritual life needs. It does need foundations if it is to last. But confidence in God means confidence in him whatever he does. It cannot mean that we are confident that we shall have what we wish to have; that would be confidence in our own judgment.

Confidence in God means that we are sure that God will look after us, that he knows better than we do what we need, and that he will give us and is now giving us what he sees we require. And if we are truly confident in him, we shall have this confidence not least but most when he seems to us to be doing the very opposite of our desire. Even when he seems not to realize how we have set out to do the best for him, we must still determine with ourselves that his judgment is best. So often it has happened that in the Sacred Scripture, where we have manifested to us the working of God's plans, we are shown how God was securing what he wanted by very circuitous ways.

Thus, for instance, when God had promised to Abraham that from his seed should come a great people, he seemed to be doing something that would make that promise of no effect when he bade him sacrifice his only son, through whom alone could that seed be born. Or still more clearly when the promises made to the patriarch Joseph that he should rule his parents and his brethren seemed to be rendered nugatory by his various misfortunes, his sale by his brethren, his being carried to Egypt, his unjust treatment in the house of Potiphar, his imprisonment; and yet it is clear to us, as it was clear later to Joseph, that by those very means that looked so unfavorable was he at last to reach that height which had been foretold him. All the while his faith still impelled him to trust in God that all would come right in the end; it did. But had his faith wavered, and had he tried to assert himself to come by his own, we can see that he would never have secured the mastership of the wealth of Egypt. Leaving himself in God's hands meant that the best and the promised vocation would be fulfilled.

But striking as was the faith of Abraham and Joseph, the faith of Our Lady was greater. She was tried even more severely than they. Her confidence in the divine purpose for her must have come early in her life, since it must have been early in her life that she consecrated her virginity to God. Like every Jewish maiden, she must have hoped to be

the Mother of the Messiah. That was and is still the hope of the women of Israel. Yet, when the angel came to salute her and offer her that motherhood, she could only reply that it was no longer possible to her, for she had foresworn the company of men. She had made her vow with the clear knowledge that it would apparently put her out from any such choice by God; she had felt the inspiration to take the vow so strongly that she had taken it, aware of what it implied and prevented.

Actually it was this very virginity of hers that made it possible for her to become the mother of God: "A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son" (Is. 7:14). But so convinced was she that all was well after the angel had spoken to her that she did not attempt to speak to St. Joseph about it. She was sure that, if he needed telling, he would be told by someone from God. Still, her confidence was tested by this doubt of his about her. It showed firm.

Was not Bethlehem also a testing of her faith? Was this Child really God? He could not protect himself, it would seem. He was dependent on these two, and without them had little chance to survive his birth. Men talk of the difficulties of believing in the face of what God lets happen. But where in the world was faith tried like hers was in all that sadness, poverty, exclusion from the inn? She still had to believe him the very God.

All this had to be faced again when there came the persecution of Herod, for it must have come to her as a temptation that he could not really be God whose only safety lay in escape from his enemy. But even this was easier than what happened at the finding in the Temple, where she came on him and could not but reproach him for having deliberately made her suffer so much pain. There was no question that it was not done deliberately. He was God. He knew exactly what would happen when he stayed behind, knew all the time that she and St. Joseph were looking for him, how they sought him sorrowing; yet, he did not let them know where he was. Before he left them, he had only to have said where he was going, for them to have trusted him alone. But he did nothing of the kind. He let them suffer and made no sign to them to explain things to them; even when they did find him, he did neither apologize to them (how could he?) nor explain to them; he left them entirely to themselves. Words indeed he spoke, but these she did not understand. She pondered over them; she "kept all these words in her heart" (Lk. 2:51).

The fruit of this pondering was evidenced at Cana of Galilee, for there too he seemed to repel her, or at least almost to say that he would not do what she hinted to him that he should do. Of course, he did not repel her but he seemed not to give her suggestion any countenance. Now she had learned

her lesson, so that at once she says to the waiters: "Whatever he shall say to you, do ye" (Jn. 2:5).

That was her own attitude to him. She told him her needs and then she left things, perfectly ready to do whatever he told her after that. It did not matter whether it seemed to be the answer that she had expected; she knew that all that was necessary was to do exactly what he said. Thus, she prolonged the same lesson into that period of her life which now followed—her desertion by him as it might have seemed in the village: "Who is my mother? These are my mother and my brethren" (see Mk. 3:33-34). Still she was now ready to do whatever he asked of her, for she knew that whatever he did was wise. She knew that whatever he did was loving, was done out of love for her. He knew too to what heights of confidence she had risen, so that when the woman lifted up her voice in the crowd and praised his mother, he gave the real greatness in her that merited all praise: "Blessed they that hear the word and keep it" (Lk. 11:28). This is what St. Luke had said of her after the finding, that she kept all these words in her heart. Well, now he too said it of her, and thus canonized her to the world.

What again was Calvary to her but a long agony of pain? She suffered in all his sufferings, every blow of the hammer made her hands, as well as his, contract with pain. Every jeer of the crowd shook her with anguish. Every coarse insult stung

her as a whip. She had all the while to know that he was God, all the while to know that the Father watched all things serenely, to be sure that, only because God loved, this awful thing could have been let happen. In our time people have said that there could not be a God in heaven, else he would have interfered to save the world from war. But she had far more reason to be staggered at the sight of such suffering, since she knew his innocence and the Father's love. But her faith failed not. Remember that she had nothing else but faith.

Did she know when they laid him in the tomb that he would rise again? Tradition seems to affirm it, but there is no absolute sureness that she did. At least, we can say that, if she did not, it would have been consistent with what happened when he was a boy. Then, during the after years when he had gone and there was nothing for her to do for him or anyone, she must have wondered why she was left. At times she must have wondered at the reason of her being left behind without him, except under veils at the hands of St. John. But her wonderment was serene and quiet and untroubled.

She knew that all was as the Father willed. But through what strange ways had God led her to this ending. Well, that was his affair. She had nothing to do with understanding why he did things; she had only to do what he arranged. So she was still, as she had begun in the first scene of her direct and visible contact with divine things: "Be it done unto

me according to Thy will" (Lk. 1:38). That was her philosophy. All that was needed was to let God go on with his plan. She had learned through life, more lovingly with every experience of it (and we know only a little of what she suffered at the hands of God), that sublime lesson of perfect confidence.

How splendidly she comes up to every occasion, this valiant woman to whom all was the outcome of the divine will. That is what made her able to face the Apostles after their denials and desertions with gracious welcome, made her forgiving and magnanimous, inspired her with courage when all the rest of them had fled like curs. Thus came her patience, her steadfastness, the unbroken heroism that allowed her to stand erect under the Cross.

How then about us? We are priests of this dispensation. The New Testament was written that we might have hope. Through all sorts of ways God guides his people to bring them where he wants them. So Abraham was brought, so Joseph, so the Mother of God. Who then are we to complain if we find that he does unaccountable things, apparently unwise things, in his treatment of us? The priest has at least the consolation of knowing that the treatment that he receives at the hands of God is easier than that treatment to which Our Lady was subjected. She had far harder tests put to her faith than we shall ever have, for each receives only that amount of temptation that he is able to bear. To him that hath, more shall be given that he may

prove himself the loyal servant, nay even friend, of God. Our Lady was the more sorely tried because she who had the greater love was better able to meet faith's difficulties.

And again, just as she had greater difficulties to meet against faith in the divinity of her Son, so had she also in the fulfillment of her way of life, her vocation. Here again, then, we have not only a model but a justification in the sight of God. She helps us as always a little better to understand God. At least we are driven to say, as we think of his treatment of her, that we are not in any position to complain if he treats us something like he treated her. In both these matters let us see a method of divine action and recognize it as the way he acts on souls.

The New Testament is a revelation of the divine character, not so much directly as by implication. We are shown God at work, the veil is lifted, and we see behind the outward appearance the divine directive power at its work of providence. She then had to face the fact that God does allow himself to be set aside and opposed and triumphed over in his human form. She had to acknowledge that. So have we. She saw herself accused falsely in the very matter of her maiden purity, and recognized that this were better left to God to deal with. She made no explanations, no defenses, but accepted the situation, feeling quite sure that God would look after her. No doubt, had St. Joseph spoken to her, she

would have told him that she was not at fault. It is hardly likely that she would have disclosed to him the secrets of the King. We then must answer accusations which are brought to us by those who have the duty to reprimand or defend. For the others we may well leave them to their own suspicions, if they have that unhappy nature. Whatever we say is not likely to disabuse them of what they have heard or imagined.

And as for our lives, we can put these without misgiving into the divine care. Put all your care on him, for he hath care of you. There is little to be gained by anger with authority that has used—as perhaps we think—our talents so ill. There is nothing to be gained by supposing that we should make our own lives at the expense of authority. We have rather to remind ourselves that God has charge of the world, and that though at times he seems to go all the way round before he brings souls to their real destiny, nevertheless he does bring them there in the end.

The Mother of God is the most outstanding example of this method of God's husbandry. She was led around by circuitous paths to that motherhood, but she left herself in the divine hands and was carried to her destiny. Beneath us are the everlasting arms. Once this has become a living truth to us, the rest of life becomes a merely blind acceptance of the life we find ourselves held to. And after that, we have the adventure of waiting to see what sort of life

it is going to be. God is the greatest and most unexpected of artists. He will respect his material that he has made, and will fashion of it what it seems good in his eyes to do.

IO UNATTRACTIVE PRAYER

There is often in our minds as we think of the Apostles almost an envy of their wonderful privilege, living so much in the blessed company of their Lord. To have that presence to inspire them, to watch him as he went about his ways, to see how he treated those who came to him, to hear his words, to see him at his prayers, to know his goodness, to handle the Word made flesh, to have his affection visible and tangible, to be touched by those healing hands, to be called by name by One who thus gathered all men's hearts to his, how easy to fall in love with him, to love God—that is, to pray. It sounds idyllic, too beautiful a way of spiritual life, an experience to be envied. And yet, in effect, it did not achieve a recognizable success. When the time came, what had they learnt? At the time of crisis they failed. One denied and one betrayed and almost all deserted him. That does not look as though it was a satisfactory way of being trained in the paths of holiness.

They had the best trainer of souls that they could have had. His method, too, must indeed have been the best, so that there can be no blame against the Master for what was done by them. It was the

condition of their spiritual life that of itself must have militated against their proper understanding of their lifework. They must have supposed that all their lives they would have the dear presence that so inspired them, and made no provision against the time when he would have to leave them.

But actually he had already told them that his going would cause them pain indeed but not hurt; they would have joy in it as a mother had in her birth-pangs, joy for what has thus been delivered into the world. So, his going would be to their advantage, it would be expedient for them. The reason, then, is not far to seek, for only after he had gone would the Paraclete come to them, and their need now was for the Paraclete rather than for him.

This seems to be a truth of the spiritual life stated with clearness by our Lord. There is some incompatibility in the inner life between sensible devotion and the depth of love. It is suggested to us that only when the sensible devotion has died down, gone out, will the real spiritual life come into its proper relationship to the whole man. Man, therefore, needs the fusing into one of his whole being. So long as he retains his devotional fervor in its physical sense, he has little chance of being able to hold to the Spirit. His upper surfaces are too engaging for him to be able to realize his lack. All goes so well with him that he does not see how ill it all is. There is the danger of mere externalism, the child's spirit of

prayer that cannot hold out against the pressure of life and its stings.

The beauty of the child's religion lies exactly in its unconsciousness; the beauty of a man's life of prayer lies in its conscious reaction to the life about him. While we are in our childhood's years, it would seem that prayer and all that it implies is easy to us. Then, as we grow up out of childhood (which the seminary life perhaps prolongs), we begin to experience difficulties in the exercise of our devotion, partly the mere effect of that period in the development of the mind when romance has become unattractive and feminine, and the critical spirit is more respected and desired. Even philosophy has its part in this drying up of the devotional life of the soul. The third year philosopher has a double dose of disdain; he is the complete doubter (as far as this is compatible with orthodoxy).

Thus, it seems to be inevitable that there should be in the story of the priest's soul the weary episode of the slow or swift decay of emotional spirituality. As in the case of the Apostles, this should be recognized to be an expedient occurrence, though it must also be reckoned a painful one. It is painful, for man naturally devotes himself more easily and more conveniently to what gives him pleasure, but for that very reason, in this matter of religion, the pain is expedient lest he find in religion something that soothes him and does not inspire him and brace him up to the difficulties of life. For we have the

exactly parallel case of the doubting Apostle who believed as soon as he saw the wounds but who would not believe on the word of his brethren. Our Lord indeed blessed his faith, for it was faith to see the humanity and believe in the divinity; but our Lord also implied that there was a greater faith—that of those who did not see and yet believed. So, it is evident that to our Lord there was a loveliness in the faith of those unnumbered millions who would never have the consolation of seeing or handling or hearing the Master, and yet whose spiritual life would be no less holy and alive.

We accept it, then, as a principle of the life of the soul that it is expedient when the merely emotional side of religion gives way to something deeper, because only with the dying down of the emotional side can the other be liberated—the advent of the Holy Spirit. That this should be so in the world of the spirit is natural enough, for here above all we need to guard against the intrusion of self and of self-complacency. Now, it is abundantly clear that, if we did enjoy prayer always, we should be with difficulty persuaded from praying always, and yet our motive in so doing might very easily be not supernatural or unselfish but human and selfish. We might easily give ourselves to prayer because we enjoyed it. That would be a poor motive, for we would be seeking not God but self.

Moreover, if we take prayer in its essential concept, it is part of the virtue of religion, which in

turn is part of the virtue of justice—the virtue, that is, which renders to everyone what is his due. In this particular instance the person to whom we render our due is God. Prayer, therefore, is not so much an indulgence as a duty. Duty is of obligation because it is duty, and for no other reason. If it be also attractive, that is perhaps an advantage; but if it is unattractive, it remains a duty still. Because what duty calls me to is something against the grain, that does not afford me an excuse for neglecting to do it. To love my parents is a duty, as also to obey them. Supposing I am anyhow devoted to my parents because they are good to me and because also they are most lovable, then all is well. But supposing they have not been good parents to me, and supposing they have no charm for me at all, that would not in any way dispense me from my duty to them. It would only serve to make my obedience a sheerly dutiful one, and might almost make it an heroic act of obedience. The relation of husband and wife is easier when both are found to be in love with each other to the end; but even if they are not, their obligations survive any alienation of feelings. Duty is a steadfast and constant thing.

The offering of prayer then (for prayer is an offering to God in testimony of our relation to him as our Creator) survives any alteration of our feelings, any dying down of them. We still have a duty to love God; and we still have a duty to offer him our

worship, and worship is expressed by prayer. There is the public and personal prayer of Mass, there is the communal prayer of Office, but there is also the obligation of offering God prayer as an individual. Now, in all these matters it is the obligation that is of the supreme necessity. We are obliged to pray. If we enjoy our prayers, the obligation is easier; but if we do not, the obligation remains. Supposing, then, that prayer is no longer enjoyable, pray still I should, for God is no less my Creator because I cannot feel any devotion to him than a parent is less a parent because he or she does not attract my feelings.

In these matters it is the will that counts. We can indeed rest content that, if we do persevere in prayer, we shall very likely recover something of the earlier fervor that we had, some even of that older feeling, for God does help souls into ways of peace. But if he does, that will not mean necessarily that prayer is now better than it was. He himself, when he came in his human nature, was no less pleasing to his Father when he seemed to be abandoned by his Father than when the good-pleasure of the Father in him was publicly announced at the baptism.

Perhaps we shall find, when life is done, that the most valuable in the sight of God were those times in our existence which gave us less pleasure than those which gave us pleasure. When all seems going well with us, this may be due only to the

absence of temptation. When we are tempted and have to fight for our very souls, we feel ourselves hard pressed and we may well judge that things are going badly with us; and yet those may be the very moments when we are meriting our eternal reward. We are so prone to judge things, not as they really are, but only as they seem to us, which means little else than what they cost us. Martyrdom was not exactly attractive to the martyrs, and they may have had no sense of the heroic in their testing; they may even have been assailed at that very time by the wonder as to whether there was any after-life at all. They may have been incredibly weary when the crucial moment came. But that would not matter. What did matter was their acceptance of the contest and their profession of faith by the will.

All this is but to say that the soul is to be measured in its development by the efforts it makes at its duty and not by the pleasure it takes in its duty. So here, then, in prayer we have to consider that the only point about prayer is that it should be done and as well done as we can do it, but that does not mean that it should be done with emotional pleasure. We would all of us like to have that pleasure whenever we prayed, but since we have it not, we must be content not to have it. We have none of us deserved it, if it be a matter of desert; and if it is not a matter of desert, then it hardly concerns us in any real way whether it be given or no, for he knows better than we what should be allowed us.

Just as we cannot deserve it, so also we cannot produce it. We can only rightly be blamed for not having those things that we could have, but the very difficulty that here confronts us is that we are dealing with emotions that of their nature lie outside the control of our will. We can keep back our tears, but can we command them to come? We can hold up the feelings of love, but can we summon love in any emotional sense of that word? The answer assuredly is pertinent to this problem, for what so often troubles priests is that they have no sentimental pleasure in the Office or prayers they say. It is something to remember that we cannot bid these emotions come, even if sometimes we have the power to bid them go.

Thus again, when we come at the end of a busy day to deal with God, it may happen that we are in no condition of awakedness to say our Office or prayers as we should, were we in the true condition that wholehearted attention requires. But then we have been busy about the things of God, or at least remotely we have been in his service; or even if we have not, then at least here we are in the state of physical tiredness which makes it impossible for us to attend to what we are saying. Then, if it be but private prayer, we are excused from saying much; if it be Office, we are excused from the full attention that normally we should be giving. Still, it is well to remember that, as long as we are doing the best we can under the circumstances in

which we are, then God will not ask more of us.

Once, it will be remembered, Christ stood by the treasury and watched the people come one by one to make their offerings. The stream that passed was of all sorts and kinds, but he noticed that there were many who gave lavishly and perhaps others who gave little at all. One there was who gave but two small coins, indeed the smallest coins of all. Yet, in his judgment she had given more generously than the others. For the others gave out of their abundance, but she had given all the living that she had. All she had she gave, and was rewarded by this judgment of his. It is his judgment, too, on prayer. It is not what my prayer is like, for no prayer of ours is worth his while. But because prayer is a duty, I have to ask whether I am giving him all I have to give here and now.

Feelings matter nothing, the consolations of God are no test of prayer, but the test is whether we are striving to reach the God of consolations.



THE PRAYER OF CONTEMPLATION

It is essential that we should remember that our Lord used the word "yoke" when he described what he came to bring mankind. Yokes are not much to be seen nowadays, but the principle on which they are constructed is simple in the extreme. The yoke is a piece of timber shaped to fit a man's shoulders and to carry two pails, one hanging down from each end. It is of considerable value in an old-fashioned farm, for it allows a weight (beyond ordinary convenience to carry) to be taken without much difficulty by a child. The principle that governs its use is the distribution of weight in such sort that it is evenly divided on either shoulder, so that neither holds more than it can carry but each takes a considerable weight; the weights in some sort by balancing each other seem to help each other. The two pails seem to weigh less than one.

But in order to manage the pails properly this is demanded—namely, that the man should get his shoulders well under the yoke. A yoke is easy to carry in proportion to the way in which the whole burden is shouldered. We have the very phrase in our language: "He has got his shoulder well under

it." This is parallel with that other phrase of "having his shoulder to the wheel." But it is certainly true of the carrying of the Cross and of the following of Christ. The more thoroughly it is done, the easier it is. To attempt to dodge or escape this or that part of it will make things much more difficult. The more thoroughly it is attempted, the easier it becomes.

Applied to prayer, it can be asserted that the easiest way of prayer is the hardest or at least highest—hardest only in this sense that it is spoken of as the hardest way of prayer by so many writers. It should not prove so hard as it is represented, nor was it thought of as difficult until some few centuries ago. Till then it was the ordinary way of praying. It is still in so many ways the normal prayer of many children, from which they are only driven by the tiresome education in religious things that so often obtains nowadays, or perhaps more truly obtains in the not far distant past.

This prayer of contemplation is the prayer which consists chiefly in silence. Silence does not mean that nothing is done. Silence is not the same as quietness taken in a negative sense. Silence can very easily be alive. It is alive and tense so many times, impressive and eloquent beyond speech. Silence is golden, not merely because it is cautious, but because it holds reserves which are sometimes split by speech.

Think, for instance, how silence is significative of respect: the silence of the guards outside the house of a ruler, their silence as they pace up and down; or the silence of the child in the presence of grown-up people at table, or the silence of those who have come to meet the distinguished stranger and want to hear him talk. Thus, how angry we are made when under these circumstances some foolish person, whose garrulity we can hear any time at all, insists on monopolizing the conversation and prevents us from hearing this other. Not only are we disappointed, but we feel that the guest has been treated without sufficient respect.

But silence is not merely respectful; it is also able to express acceptance where speech would be impossible or perhaps untrue. We can bear a great deal of pain and disappointment if we are not expected to say so. The bearing of things in silence is easier than if we have to declare our willingness to do so. Moreover, sometimes at least we should hardly be honest if we said that we did accept the trouble that had come on us. Sincerity compels us to deny what we can accept without a murmur, if no word of acceptance is asked of us. Or again, we can bear pain if no one says anything, but if someone sympathizes with us we may easily break down. We can let them get to work on us and hold out while we grip our chair till the knuckles go white. But if we are asked whether we feel anything, we

shall surely cry out. Even death's removal of those we love is bearable in silence. To speak about it to another would be too much.

We may say also of silence that it has a place in the language of love. Indeed, we may almost say that love has no other language but silence, except death. Death too is the uttermost language of love. For, consider first that words are inadequate to express our deepest feelings, since these are beyond the narrow limits of words. How can we pack into such a small compass the full tide of our hungers or desires? How vain are love's repetitions to those who are not in love. But what else can love do except repeat itself, since having said that it loves it can do no more than say it again? Secondly, we can say of love that words are even unnecessary. They are not only inadequate but they are useless, because there is no need to speak. The heart sees and is content. Words are only needed when there is no other method of communication, but when hearts are at one then speech is an interruption, a break, a violation, a separation, a wall built between.

Consider, then, that if we apply this to our spiritual dealings with God in prayer, we are justified in saying that silence is an admirable way of dealing with him. Thus, we must needs show him reverence; and how better than by silence? He will speak to me surely if I listen. Only God does not shout. He is not in the whirlwind but in the still small voice. He must have much to say to

me to guide me, to advise me in my dealings with other souls; he must have much to say to me about myself and what he wishes of me. How can he say it if I do not listen? That he should hear me has its importance, that I should hear him is of greater importance. He is wisdom and he speaks to our heart. Then let me be still and hear what he has to say to me: "Be still, and know that I am God."

So equally can we say of silence in prayer that we can be honestly silent when it would not be honest to speak. We can bear what happens, though we shall not be able honestly to say that we accept it gladly as he would like us to do and as we should like to do ourselves. We can sit in front of him and wait for him to effect in us what he desires. His power is greater than ours, so that we can leave him to achieve his purpose in us while we wait his act in a spirit of loving attention. That is the very phrase of St. Teresa, the phrase too of St. Francis de Sales, even of St. Thomas Aquinas—"loving attention."

Then the English mystics say that "contemplation is a sight." That can but mean the same thing. We watch in faith and worship, and by our watching and yearning show him that we are true adorers of his majesty. They also worship who bow down and remain in silence. For in this case we are accepting what he does. Why he does what he does, we do not know in particular; we know that all he does is done out of love for us. We may not be able

to say to him that we accept the actual thing that has befallen us. But that does not matter. We can sit and bear with it, and say no word. That is enough. The widow of Naim said no word to him; she did but weep. But are not tears part of that silent speech of acceptance? So eloquent was her silence that he worked the miracle that she did not ask, yet craved.

Still more in the divine order is silence an expression of love. If in human love silence alone can express that which is inexpressible, shall this not be even more true of divine love? What words can hold the things we should say to Infinite Beauty? How shall we tell him all that we would wish? Words are inadequate for the telling of love human. Can we dare suppose that they will be any more satisfactory in telling love divine? Or shall we say that, although human love needs no words for its speaking, divine love is more destitute and has a need for words? If visible things can yet reach understanding without one word spoken, shall not love of that which is Invisible secure its own intimate relationship by the way of some less tangible a medium than speech?

It is enough for the lover to be with the beloved. Presence suffices to give joy. That the old man and his wife should be together is enough for them during the long winter evenings. They are content to be thus in each other's company. Youth no less than age can remain in bliss with its beloved. The warmth of the sun, the fragrance of nature, the idly falling waters down the long cascade, the lift

and fall of the sea, will hold them in intercommunion without a word spoken; those are the moments looked back to afterwards as the supreme moments of love. Well, shall not prayer come like that too sometimes, when all else fades except the presence of that Other whom eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor man's heart ever conceived? That is all that is meant by the prayer of silence, of contemplation. It is a gazing at God: "Contemplation is a sight." Shall we say also that it is an insight? That it lifts a little the veil, though there must be veil upon veil beneath?

Now, the point that comes in here is to ask whether this will be very difficult to the priest. We are inclined to say that it sounds marvelous, and that we wish we could dare hope for something like that to happen to us, and that perhaps when we are old we may indeed have some taste of that blessed state, but that at present it is impossible for one so busy as we are and so rushed by work. So saying, we ignore and confound the saints. For many of them life was even more full of business than ours is. Read the life of St. Augustine or St. Gregory or St. Bernard, who were all three of them much more busy than we and yet managed to find time for contemplation. Oh, because they were saints they could manage it. On the contrary, because they managed it they are saints.

Sanctity does not cause but follows from that attitude. Out of silence comes forth strength. Busi-

ness has nothing to do with it, except that the busier we are the greater our need for such prayer. Business only makes it more necessary. Ordinary prayer we are too rushed for. This silent prayer will become a need. If we can only try honestly to begin it, we shall find that it will grow in the soul. It requires above all things leisure, not of time but of the spirit; that is, it requires a spirit that wishes for leisure. No more than that is required. We do long for this. But we shall not be able to reach it now without strenuous efforts. Without these it is impossible to reach heaven. Only the violent bear it away.

Let us suppose that someone wants to use this method of prayer. We shall start by telling them that what they must realize is that it is natural and normal to use it. A child is often content to look at things. It does not need to do anything. It is content to observe. It will sit for as long as you like watching things. It has the genius of contemplation. So too we know that the early hermits in the desert were accustomed to pray in this way, but with a difference—the very difference suggested by St. Teresa. For her the beginnings of contemplation lay in the use of ejaculatory prayer. The beginner was to start by making prayers of ejaculation. Only he was to be in no hurry to pass from one ejaculation to another or even to repeat the same ejaculation, except after a pause. Thus prayed our Lord in the garden, with his petitions and the pause between.

It is the pause between that is the beginning of contemplation, savoring the meaning of the phrase till its full meaning is tasted to the full. It is like the man who savors wine, tasting it to the uttermost—not drinking it at a gallop, but taking it slowly and pausing to secure the taste. In prayer of this kind the soul tastes the wonder of its ejaculations. It repeats slowly, pausing till it has exhausted what the ejaculation has to give. Then it turns to another and repeats that in the same way. Or it maybe takes the Pater Noster in its several phrases and uses that or any other prayer known by heart.

From this the soul will pass to find that it does not need ejaculations even, though most require at a beginning some hallowed saying to enable them to go on their way. They need to be thus “warmed up.” Meditation tends to be a mental exercise, whereas this is different. It tastes, it gazes, it is silent between.

Only by persevering can the soul reach to this, for it will have to go back upon all the habits of its earlier ways of prayer. But the thing can be done and is worth it. Out of this comes a new life for the spirit. We pray badly because we talk too much or forget what we are at. Nor is this a lazy method. Mary was as much occupied as Martha was: Martha however was occupied with many things, Mary with One. That One we may reach in this way. Those who do are blessed indeed.

12 MADE PERFECT IN HOPE

After the prayer of contemplation the soul turns to the center of its life easily. That center is God. For him we believe we were created. To lead men to him is one principal part of our priesthood. We have to introduce man to God and to offer to God man and the things of man. In this wise we see that heaven is not far from us ever, since what is heaven but the sight of God? God is not far from us at any time. We are then close to him. And the greatness of our life depends upon our recognition of this. We must choose him always wherever he is, and he is everywhere. He is to be found even in the midst of pain.

Naturally the soul wishes to escape what hurts the body, so closely are they united. Not one member can suffer without both suffering. But this wish to escape will not be imputed to the weakness of the soul. Dread of pain is natural and inevitable. What is demanded is that our wills should be set on him. That surely is what has taken place ever since we felt ourselves called to serve him in this way of priesthood. We have, after all our faults, still clung to him, knowing that this is what we are

created to do. And this inward dedication of the soul to him is the important factor of our lives. It is this inward that draws the outward, or that can if it will. We can use that inner attention to divine things to hold us to him, and so make the rest wrought into what he desires.

We have it on record that he himself when he was on earth also had dread of pain: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death" (Mk. 14:34), said he. It was his hour of agony. There was no respite for him. He was compelled to drain the chalice to its dregs. But though his nature loathed pain, yet his will was set upon the will of his Father, so that even in the very depths of his Passion he remembered to add to his sad prayer the acquiescence of his will to the Father's. He was willing at heart to suffer death if need be, but his nature that is one with ours had its fears.

Our nature, which is one with his, brings us into relation to him in his pain. We know that his taking upon himself of our nature was no pretense. Scandal though it is to the Greek to see God suffering in his human nature, it is nevertheless true. His Cross was a scandal to the intelligentsia of his day. St. Paul bears witness to that as a difficulty. It is still a difficulty. It will always be a difficulty to conceive of God dying in that way. But what redeems the squalor of his death is the manner in which he bore it. In itself it might have ended his call to rule to mankind; actually it has added to the

charm of his perfections. His suffering makes him our fellow in a life of hardship. On the Cross he comes into our own method of life, so that we think of him always as one of ourselves.

But then, if we abide with him on his Cross, we shall pass with him into those heights where he reached his Father. When he had come to that, he was at peace. Until then his agony was a prolongation of the distress of the garden. From that moment he entered, even here, into the Paradise which he promised to the thief that believed in him. Into his Father's hands he resigned his soul, his life, all that remained of that body he had taken from the Virgin's womb. His final condition was not one of peace only, but of joy as well. "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30), he said, to indicate what had now befallen him. All was accomplished. In the full possession of himself he bowed his head in death, peacefully as a child sleeping, happily as a boy with his game over, manfully as a youth who has started gloriously the opening stage of his profession, whose examinations are over, whose real life has at last begun.

All this is in him for our sakes. He was what he was that the Father might be satisfied by his death through love and as an expression of his obedience to the generous policy of God. But also he was what he was, in order that he might bring us to his Father. It was not a mere abstract fulfillment of the divine justice; it was also to be the introduction

of man again to God. There could not be but a personal side to this satisfied justice. God needed to be satisfied only because God wanted the love of man. That love could only be brought to its fulfillment by the Incarnation and death of our Lord, in order that its fruits might be communicated to us. We can only secure what we need through him. Our Lord, we say, is the sole mediator, which means that he alone can bring man to God, and alone too bring to man the gifts of God. All gifts are ours, as St. Paul reminds us, because we are Christ's. He received, in order that he might bring to us what he received.

Thus was he our mother in begetting us to his Father (as the Fathers of the Church loved to repeat). He is our mother, say with quaintness the old English mystics of the fourteenth century: "All the fair working and all the sweet natural office of dear worthy motherhood is appropriate to the Second Person; for in him we have this godly will whole and safe without end, both in nature and in grace, of his own proper goodness. I understood three manners of beholding the motherhood of God: the first is in his making of us; the second is in the taking of our flesh, for thence came his motherhood of working, and therein is a spreading forth of the same grace, an outpouring of it of length and breadth and of height and of deepness without end." Thus wrote Mother Julian of Norwich, and she added: "And all is one Love."

We can see that, to use his own simile in the Gospel, the mother gives birth to her child in pain and yet has joy of it. But she gives birth to him, and thereby brings into a life of suffering, a life that death must one day close and end; whereas this other begets us into life—an eternal life that ends all sorrow and gives endless joy. But the mother not only gives birth to her child, but lays him to her breast and feeds him. Thus too does our Lord with souls. He brings them to himself by the Church; he feeds them by the sacraments; his wounds are the places where he hides us, and in them we can find protection from the evils about.

Was he not thinking of himself when he said that the mother, when she has brought forth her child, remembers no more what the child cost her, but only has joy that he is born? It was as though he wished us to realize that, when he thought of what the Passion was going to effect in us, he no longer felt the agonies of suffering and death. In this too was included a motive for happiness, not in himself only, but in us as well. We too should have something to remind us that the end of life is not here but elsewhere. We too should have something to tell us that we can have in our hearts the merriment that he had when he went to the Way of the Cross in joy—like a giant running his course, like the bridegroom that waits to see the bride but can reach her only by going out to greet her. We

have need for this. And the motive is simple—love. Love can do this wonderful thing.

By love, then, we mean a steadfastness of the will pledged to serve God in his will where it is manifest. That is the perfection of man; it is also in an increased sense the perfection of the priesthood. The implication of the chastity which is vowed to God is that he is taken in the place of a spouse. Just as in the married life the choice has been made of the one who is alone to share the heart without rival and without parting other than death, so in the priesthood God is chosen deliberately as alone to hold that place which in others the human partner occupies against the world. This is the ideal of celibate life as here understood: not that others are excluded so much as that God reigns alone.

Celibacy is not the negative refusal to accept a wife but the positive acceptance of God as the beloved. It is never right merely to consider the avoidance of temptations against chastity, for in that way they will not be avoided; the best way, perhaps the only way, to avoid them is to have the heart already occupied. It should be occupied by God. Thus, there is a dedication of the will to him in such sort that he is made the center. This implies and will bring with it the surrender of life to him. Thus will the whole of us accept his bidding and follow his directions and become what he would have us become.

All this is to be brought about by prayer. Prayer persevered in should make us see life as a whole, in the round. What irritates us in life can do so only insofar as we miss the general philosophy in Christ's teaching. Wisdom, which is philosophy in practice, can fulfill in us this completion of the perfect faith of Christ. Under its inspiration God is recognized as the need of life, God as Truth and Goodness and Beauty. As truth, he is discovered to be the goal of all in us that thinks and argues, that has intuition, that sees. As goodness, he is recognized as the magnet that draws our admiration and our reverence, that incomparable perfection which we can never reach and yet can never wholly dislodge from our ideal as the true self we would wish to be. As beauty, he pulls at our heartstrings and makes himself evident as the maker of the world. All else that attracts us here is seen to be nothing else but him only—him vested, hidden, veiled. Henceforth during our life the beauties that might else disturb us are seen as revealing him at every turn, so that prayer turns temptations into helps, occasions of sin into showings of his handiwork, the loveliness of man or nature or art as the proof of his power and the charm of himself.

Prayer can do this and prayer alone. We needs must persevere to reach this stage of life. It was reached by the saints in prayer. It would be foolish, indeed dangerous, to think that we can in any other way attain it. In venturing to attain it otherwise, we

should almost certainly perish, as others have perished who began their priesthood with the idea that there was no harm in the world. There may not be harm in the world, but there is harm in us. We judge no man save ourselves. We know of a truth that we are sinners, even though we know of others only that they make mistakes. But since we are sinners, it is unwise to suppose that we can venture into life and find it a place of innocence, unless we have first and unceasingly tried to make our own hearts innocent. There was no promise made that the pure of heart should see God, as though we could remain pure of heart even when we made no effort to see God first. So prayer enters into the life of the priest as an essential quality. He has to blame no one but himself, if he fails to pray and then wonders why he is so beset with troubles.

Without prayer, moreover, self-deceit is ready enough to come knocking at the door, till a man hardly knows whether he be a sinner in what he does. He can find so many authorities who allow that this or that can be done without mortal sin, that he begins to find reasons for doing all he is drawn to do—instead of merely excusing certain things after he has done them. His books of moral theology are searched, not to see what the law is nor the common teaching of theologians, but only to find an escape from his conscience and its bothering sting. For him speedily the uttermost allowable, and not the best, becomes the rule of life.

There is no escape from this state of mind other than by prayer, for prayer is that adhesion of the mind and will to God which is bound to affect man not only in the actual moments when he deliberately gives himself to this exercise but all through the day that has been so begun. Such an attitude will be effected in us so that we shall readily hold to God in himself first and foremost, and then come at last to find him in all his world. But there is no doubt but that this will be obtained (not directly but indirectly) only by prayer. Only then shall we walk free in the world and find it indeed God's world, his workmanship, his dwelling place, the place where his beauty is reflected. This only comes by gazing at him and then going out to look at the world.

In the broad sunlight, if we gaze at the sun, we shall find that our eyes have become so starred with the round bright disk of glory that, wherever else we turn our eyes, we can see nothing else but it, blocking everything besides. So, says St. Gregory, shall we see God everywhere if we have gazed steadily at him in deliberate prayer each day.

The world is today morally what the priesthood has made it. If anywhere the Church has failed to hold her people, we know that the fault must lie principally with the priests. And if the priests have failed, it will as likely as not be for either of two reasons: either because they have failed in the fearless rebuking of their own people in matters that

concern public disregard of the moral law, or because they have not prayed. To refuse to denounce public crimes because they have been committed by our civic or national leaders is, in the end, to incur the contempt of those very ones whose loyalty or support by their silence they hoped to hold. To have failed to pray is similarly to destroy the foundations of that claim to the leadership of their people that is the priest's by right. We have only a right to lead the people because we come to them with the words of God. God's words will only seem authentic on our lips when we have learned them, not only from the Church in teaching, but from the Spirit of God in prayer as well. Only those shall be true apostles who "have seen the Lord."

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